

SINCLAIR THOMSON:

OR,

THE SHETLAND APOSTLE.

BY

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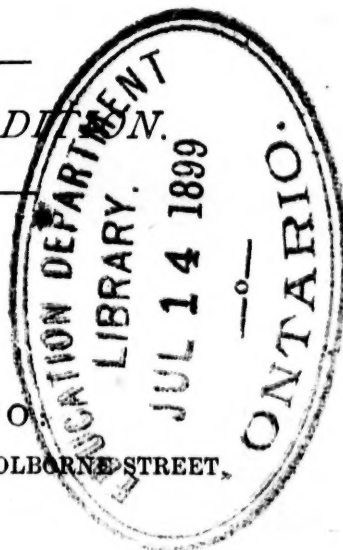
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CANADIAN EDITION.
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TORONTO

BAPTIST BOOK ROOM, 25 COLBORNE STREET,

1872.



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I.

SHETLAND AND ITS PEOPLE.

 HE scene of the following narrative is the Shetland Islands, the remote and rocky cluster seen upon the map, at the north of Scotland. The individual with whom the narrative is principally concerned, born upon one of those islands, was, in many of his characteristics, not unlike them : a plain man, content with a comparatively humble sphere, unadorned by worldly polish, yet sustaining through life a manly battle with adverse circumstances, resembling that which his native islands forever maintain against the encroaching sea, and, like them, proving that the best qualities, whether of things or men, in this world, are by no means those most showy. The circumstances of his early life, his conversion, and of his ministry,

which exhibits more of the truly apostolic than one often meets with in these modern times, justify the record of them which we propose to make. He was the first person who had ever received scriptural baptism in the Shetland Islands; he was among the first to break through that jungle of formalism with which, at that time, the State Church establishment had not only covered those islands, but in a great part Scotland itself. The Baptist churches of Shetland all recognize him as their spiritual father, and his memory is cherished amongst them, much as that of Paul must have been in Philippi, and Thessalonica, and Ephesus.

Shetland and her people have many peculiarities that need to be sketched here, in order that the narrative we have undertaken may be appreciated. These islands are among the northernmost inhabited lands of the world, and have very many of the characteristics of such lands. They lie between the fifty-ninth and sixty-second degrees of north latitude; in longitude being about one degree west of the meridian of Greenwich. The principal island, which, on account of its greater extent, is termed, not quite accurately, the "mainland," is some sixty miles in length and nearly thirty in breadth. It is, however, penetrated on

both sides by arms of the sea, which extend far inland and afford some of the best harbors in the world. These are often completely landlocked, and so sheltered that even when the sea, on exposed coasts, is raging and perilous, they are as quiet and safe as some inland American lake. There are nearly one hundred other islands in the group, large and small : the principal being Yell, some sixteen miles long by eight broad, and Unst, twelve in length and eleven in breadth ; besides which may be mentioned Papa-Stour, Mickie Roe, Whalsey, Bigga, Burra, and the Skerries. Many of the islands are scarcely more than mere rocks in the ocean, while others are sufficiently extensive to afford grazing for a few cattle and sheep.

The country throughout Shetland is level and low. One elevation, in the north part of Mainland, might deserve the name of a mountain, being 1,476 feet above the level of the sea. Most of the cultivated lands lie along those arms of the sea just described ; the centre of the principal islands, especially of the "mainland," being of peaty, mossy nature, and covered mostly with heather. The soil is chiefly held by a few aristocratic landlords, some of whom own as much as twelve miles of country side, and live in palatial residences ;

one of these, it is stated, built in 1833, by a Mr. Robert Bruce, costing two hundred thousand dollars. The mass of the people occupy the land as tenants. The landlords are often oppressive, compelling their tenants to sell them the slender produce of their farms at not much more than half the market value.* The people, however, are exceedingly industrious, and out of their scanty soil, aided by their fisheries, manage to procure a comfortable livelihood. Their habitations are small, solid structures, built almost wholly of stone ; granite, sandstone and limestone abounding in all directions. The work of the farm is done chiefly by the women, the men being absent during the season when either farm-work or fishing is practicable, in their often quite extended voyages. The free air of that country, and the almost constant out-door occupation, give the people a remarkably ruddy and healthful appearance. One born in Shetland, and who, notwithstanding years

* As an example of the style in which these landlords sometimes treat their tenants, we may quote the following sentence from a letter of Mr. Thomson to Michael Tait, a friend much valued by him, now residing near Joliet, Ill. : "You will wonder," he says, "when I tell you that Mr. H. has turned out every tenant in North and South Lee, in Dale and Trackafeld, and east of the Voe of Dale, and devoted the whole to a sheep-walk."

of absence, has not ceased to love his native islands, says of his countrymen, that "they are an active, hardy people, generally good looking—many of them really beautiful—especially the lasses ; their cheeks vieing with the sunny side of the ripe peach, and other parts white as the lily." The Shetlanders are great pedestrians, a walk of ten miles and return being a very common feat with them. Some of the performances in this line of the subject of our present narrative, were not a little remarkable.

During no small portion of the year, the people of Shetland are constrained to spend much of their time indoors. This leads to many pleasant associations, which the simple, kindly temper of the people tends to foster. About midsummer, the sun does not set until nearly ten o'clock in the evening, and rises shortly after three o'clock ; but in winter, the king of day comes drowsily up from his bed in the ocean only between ten and eleven, and disappears again shortly after three. The extreme of cold is considerably less, even in the depth of winter, than in many countries much farther south, ice seldom forming thick enough to bear the weight of a man. The cold of winter is tempered by the breezes from the sea, which also

soften the heats of summer. Much wet and tempestuous weather, however, is experienced, and heavy fogs are frequent. The islands are now supplied with good common schools, in which the Bible is one of the principal books used.

A chief occupation of the Shetlanders, as already intimated, is their fishery. The sea, along their coast, is rich in nearly all the kinds of fish most valued in market; especially ling, tusk, cod, halibut, and herring. The boat is usually about eighteen feet long, six or seven broad, and from three to four feet deep. It carries a mast some twenty feet in length, with a square, or log sail. Six men, with their oars when needed, compose the crew. In these vessels they perform voyages of from ten to one hundred miles, leaving home early on Monday morning, and returning at the end of the week. Their fishing ground is chiefly among the small islands, at a distance from the "mainland." On these little islands, uninhabited chiefly, they build huts, or "lodges," for their occupation during the week. They fish mostly with long lines, at a depth ranging from forty to one hundred fathoms. Larger vessels often sail as far as to North Faroe, and some even to Greenland and Davis' Straits.

The people have a method of catching a species of fish called the sillock, that deserves a most particular description. A rude net is first made by uniting twenty or thirty pairs of blankets, with ropes above and below to preserve them from tearing, and weights to sink them. A dozen or more boats will go out thus provided, the men bearing long poles, each with a whisp of straw at the end. After proceeding a short distance from the land, by thrusting the poles with the straw end foremost into the water, they drive the fish shoreward like a flock of sheep. On reaching shallow water, the net is let down and hauled to the land. The fishermen will sometimes fill a score of boats in this way. These little fish are excellent for food, and find a ready market. Herring are caught in a similar way, and in such abundance, often, that thirty of them will be sold for a penny, and the dealer still make money. Great shoals of mackerel, also, frequently visit this coast to enrich the Shetland fishery.

A life, such as we have just described, is one of adventure and danger. Those northern seas are stormy and rude. The frail boat of the fisherman is often surprised, when far out, by the sudden and furious tempest. In battling with such, he early

learns to be a good sailor ; but disasters are frequent, and there is often "sorrow on the sea," and sorrow also in the storm-beaten dwelling at home. These vicissitudes, however, and this familiarity with danger, tend to educate an excellent class of seamen, and hence the English ships, bound for Greenland, often call at Lerwick, the capital and principal port of Shetland, to complete their crews from the hardy fishermen of that stormy coast.

The islands of Shetland, whose population may be now, probably, between thirty and forty thousand, once belonged to Denmark. When, however, a princess of that country was married to James III. of Scotland, these islands went with her as a part of the dowry. They thus became, ultimately, a part of Great Britain, and together with the Orkney Islands on the south, are represented by one member of Parliament. For many centuries the religion was that of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and at the time when our narrative opens, had degenerated into a species of formalism that contained very little indeed of the life and power of godliness. Provided certain outward forms were duly observed, certain tithes paid, it was quite possible, as we shall see in the course

of our story, to maintain a church-standing entirely respectable, although indulging in worldly amusements of all kinds, and even with habits unchanged of positive dissipation. It was possible to be even a smuggler, and still have a reputable standing in the church.

The first breach upon the monopoly held by the Established Church, was made about the beginning of the present century. A division then occurring in the church at Lerwick, on a question of discipline, a portion of that church drew off and commenced holding religious meetings by themselves. Soon after, an Independent minister from Scotland, Mr. George Reid, being on a visit to the islands, finding this little flock in a shepherdless condition, became its minister, and in due time established the first Independent Church in Shetland. In 1815, a Methodist mission was also planted in the island, under the direction of Dr. Adam Clarke. At the time, however, when our narrative opens, these movements were yet in prospect, and Shetland knew no other gospel than the much mutilated one that had for so long, so little deserved the name.



II.

EARLY HOME AND EARLY LIFE,



INCLAIR THOMSON was born September 3rd, 1784, upon the "mainland" in Shetland. His parents belonged to the peasant class, but were of the better order of such. There were, in all, in the family, seven sons, and three daughters. The parents were active and frugal, strictly observant of the rules of a moral life, and of the forms enjoined by the "kirk," of which they were members. It was their aim to train their children to walk in the same "old paths," and to prepare them for honorable and useful lives by such education as it might be in their power to secure them. Sinclair learned most of what he knew, of even the elements of education, at his mother's

knee. She seems to have been a good and true woman, and her son cherished her memory, as also that of his father, with filial reverence, to the latest hour of his own life.

Their home was, of course, such as was common to that condition of life in which they were born, and which, though lowly, was still independent and honorable. The reader must recall the dwelling of a Shetland peasant, as before described, a one-story cottage, of rough stone, from twenty-five to thirty feet in length, and twelve, perhaps, in breadth, with its thatched roof descending to within six or eight feet of the ground. It has one door and two small windows. As we enter, we see few comforts, and no luxuries. Two rooms below, with suitable pantries and closets, and two in a small loft above, compose the extent of its accommodations. Its furniture is simple, but solid and sufficient, embracing articles, often, that have been heir-looms in the family for many generations. The Shetlander is accustomed to a hardy life without, and a frugal life within, and for superfluities has neither use nor room. Around the dwelling outside, one imagines the miscellaneous mingling of implements that suggests the double occupation of the household, by sea and

by land. Yet the surroundings, however rude, are beautiful in the light of the long summer day. Daisies and white-clover blossoms are sprinkled here and there ; the heather-bell adds its modest adorning ; while the hand of diligent culture turns to beauty and use every portion of the garden and farm.

At the time of which we write, there was little to vary the monotony or disturb the quiet of Shetland life, save such incidents as were peculiar to itself. Communication with the world beyond was rare. Whatever agitations were felt elsewhere, little was known of them in those far-northern islands, called by the ancients the "Ultima Thule"—the very end of the world. Occasionally some ship, bound on a whaling voyage in the Arctic seas, would pause at the principal port to complete its crew, or supply other deficiencies in its outfit, and leave behind it tidings of great events stirring abroad ; or a chance traveller from the cities of the South would appear, perhaps a preacher, perhaps some land-owner's agent, and from him a few scraps of news be eagerly gathered. Such opportunities of information as the Shetlander now enjoys, and as are everywhere deemed prime necessities of life, were unknown in the islands then. The peasant

went his round of daily toil ; sowed and gathered his scant harvest ; in the fit season varied this with his more hardy vocation at sea ; filled up his long summer day and his long winter night with the same cares, and occupations, and diversions, as had engaged his father before him ; on the Lord's day took his place punctually in the church, joined reverently in psalm and prayer, and listened to the preacher as one authorized to guide his faith. In his way he "feared God and worked righteousness," although with but a limited scope of ideas, with wants and aspirations soon satisfied.

The children of the family were then early taught not only to observe with strictness the common rules of morality, but to practice certain habits of devotion. There was a little book, quite common in those days, containing a form of prayer for the morning of Sabbath, and another for the evening. These two forms of prayer, Sinclair and his brothers and sisters, so soon as they were old enough, were required to commit to memory, and on each morning and evening of the Sabbath to go by themselves and repeat them. On the Sabbath, also, in that family, morning and evening worship was held, at which all were required to be present. Either family or closet prayer upon any

other day of the week than Sunday, was a rare thing. On that day, however, both were scrupulously observed in all households that made any pretensions to religion at all.

It was amidst scenes like these that Sinclair spent his early youth. He was, however, an ambitious lad, and the small measure of education which he found at home did not satisfy him. But it was a long distance to any school, and it was difficult to spare him from the daily tasks in which the others shared. When about the age of fourteen he became acquainted with a person, living some two miles away, who could write. To this person he would run, after the day's work was finished, obtain copies, and returning with them, would write them out by the light of the fire before bedtime. In this way he acquired some proficiency in the use of the pen. His parents, observing the bent of his mind, and pleased with his persistence and the improvement he made, determined, if possible, to give him better advantages. He was accordingly sent to an uncle, some twelve miles off, to reside in his family and attend the parish school. This arrangement, however, was soon and sadly interrupted. At the end of two months the father died. Called home to attend the funeral,

he returned once more ; but was, at the end of two weeks, again summoned home by the fatal illness of a sister. As the fever of which she died was deemed infectious, he was not allowed to return ; and here his school-days ended.

At the age of seventeen, our young Shetlander, unable to content himself with the quiet life of home, joined a whaling vessel on its voyage to the Polar seas. Three such voyages he made before reaching the age of twenty. He was a bold, resolute seaman, familiar with the ocean in its roughest moods from his boyhood, and fond of perilous adventure. We have no record of his life on ship-board, save that he took his full share both in the common duties of a sailor, and those of a whale-man in the boats. When "grog" was served he did not decline his full share of this also ; and in the merry-making of the crew, having learned to play the violin, he was a sort of leader and master of the revels. Doubtless some of the habits and characteristics which we observe in him later, were formed amidst these associations—favorable to the development of a courageous, energetic spirit, but very unfavorable to either piety or virtue.

A little past the age of twenty, he married ; and

with that event ended his whaling expeditions. Shortly after his marriage he moved to Spiggie, in the parish of Dunrossness, forty miles from his native parish. Here the bad effects of his late associations very soon began to appear. His proficiency with the violin, of which he became fond in his boyhood, and with which he had acquired considerable skill, caused him to be much sought after in all that region of country whenever a dance was to be held. This itself was by no means a promising beginning for a young man's career ; but worse followed. Marrying so young, and settling at a distance from his former home, he found himself under the necessity of resorting to vigorous measures for supplying the demands of his new mode of life. The small farm he had rented required to be stocked, a share in a fishing boat, with its necessary tackle, to be secured—his dwelling replenished with furniture, and means of livelihood secured. About this time, fortunately as he thought—far from being so in reality—a smuggling vessel appeared off the coast ; the cargo was principally Holland gin. A trade sprang up in this contraband article, the people in the neighborhood receiving it from the smugglers and sending it to other ports, where it was greedily

bought. Sinclair Thomson being familiar with the waters of the coast lying between his present place of residence and that of his birth, it was proposed to him to pilot the vessel in which the forbidden trade between these two points was carried on. To this he readily consented, receiving as his wages sometimes three, sometimes more, kegs of gin. In this way he made from one pound ten to three pounds, each voyage.

This employment was a perilous one, besides being in more than one sense criminal. The voyages were made in the winter as well as in the summer, and on two of such he narrowly escaped drowning. He was, too, laying himself open to the severe penalties of the law, and esteemed himself fortunate when, being at one time arrested and taken to Lerwick for trial on the charge of smuggling, he escaped with the fine of a guinea. To increase his gains, he about the same time opened in his own house a shop for retailing gin; and uniting with this his practice with the violin—sometimes in dances at his own house, sometimes in neighboring places—he seems to have regarded himself as a prosperous man. For the evil of these courses had not as yet been fully brought home to him. There were many things to quiet

his conscience. His standing in the "kirk," to which he had been early introduced, remained unimpaired. The minister always met him blandly, with no word of reproof for either his gin-selling, his smuggling, or his fiddling. He even filled an office in the church, his musical skill having pointed him out as a fit person to be the precentor of the parish; the duty of that office being to conduct the singing on all occasions of public worship.

It was thus that the life we have undertaken to sketch began. Very little promise was yet apparent of that which afterward came; and no would have sought, in the youth we have described, the destined apostle of a purer faith and a holier practice than Shetland had yet known. Yet was he none the less one of the Lord's "vessels of mercy," and in due time the call to a higher life and a worthier mission was heard and obeyed.





III.

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.



ON a pleasant Sabbath morning in July, 1809, three young men were on their way to the Spiggie parish church. There was to be no service there, the minister being engaged at another parish between which and this he divided his Sabbaths, alternately ; and still these young men had an errand at the kirk. It was the law that whenever a wedding was to take place in any Shetland parish, it should be proclaimed from the kirk pulpit three Sabbaths in succession. This was the duty of the precentor. Should no service be held, the proclamation must nevertheless be made, the precentor taking with him two or three persons as witnesses. Such was the law in force at the time of which we write ; and these three young men were on their

way to perform this duty. One of them was Sinclair Thomson, the precentor of Spiggie parish. The two others were friends whom he was taking with him, as companions and witnesses.

The distance they had to travel was some two miles. The morning was warm, and becoming thirsty, they stepped into a cottage at the roadside to ask a cup of water. A woman was within, engaged in reading a little book. Having obtained the drink they sought, they sat for a few moments to rest, and Thomson, after explaining their reasons for taking this Sabbath-morning walk, enquired of the woman,

"Are you a member of our kirk?"

"No," was the reply, "I belong to the missionary church in Lerwick."

"The missionary church? What is that?"

"It is sometimes called," answered the woman, "the Independent Church."

"But how did you come to be a member there while living here?"

"I am a native of this parish," she answered, "but have lived for some time in Lerwick. While there I attended the meetings of the Independents, and after a while joined them."

"Ah," said Thomson, "I have heard of those

people, and have often thought I would like to fall in with some of them. It is very wrong to leave the kirk and run after folk of this kind. But we must now be going. When I come back along, I will step in and have a little talk with you."

To this the woman made a pleasant reply, and the three friends went on their way. The duty at the church performed, they returned, and, according to promise, Thomson (his companions not caring to stop) turned in once more to the cottage, and taking a seat, began conversation. Little as his own life honored a Christian profession, he was, nevertheless, very strenuous for that way of faith and worship in which he had been brought up; and honestly feeling that here was a misguided person who needed to be set right, he applied himself to the work with characteristic earnestness. His words were such as might have been expected from such a one as he; more strong and decided than winning. The woman sat in silence. Stung a little that she gave him no reply, and half-conscious that she was "answering a fool according to his folly," he became bitter and irritating in his language. The woman still sat mute, listening quietly but making no reply. Finally he ceased, feeling that it was not quite manly to be using

harsh words to a person who had given him no provocation whatever, and a woman into the bargain. Her patience, also, impressed him as something remarkable. He said to himself, as he looked at her, "Sure I am that if you had spoken so irritatingly to me, I should not have borne it half so well."

Perceiving, finally, that he had plunged into a controversy where the contention was all on his own side, and somewhat at a loss how to close the interview, he finally asked,

"Will you lend me that little book which you are reading?"

She held it out to him at once, with the words, "You are welcome to it as your own."

He was surprised and pleased; and soon taking his leave, went home to his house, and after dinner sat down to read his book. It was the more a treasure, as books, save the Psalms and Paraphrases, found in most Shetland houses, were among the rarest things he had known. It proved to be a brief treatise on "The Propriety of Communicating (observing the Communion) every Lord's Day." Among the things which had been reported of the "missionaries," as they were called, or the Independents, from Scotland, who were

then just beginning to effect a lodgment at Lerwick, was this practice of celebrating what was termed the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on each Sabbath day. Mr. Thomson had also heard this of them, and like others had accounted it one of the worst things laid to their charge. In the Established Church, the Sacrament was observed only four times in each year. It was preceded by "preparation days," and by various forms intended to impress the people with its very great sacredness. It had that effect, and more, instilling superstitious notions concerning it, not unlike, in some of their tendencies, those which the Catholics hold regarding their sacrifice of the Mass. That this Sacrament should be observed without any of those formal preliminaries, and made part of each Sunday service, seemed to Thomson an actual profanation.

Under these impressions he opened his book and began to read. He found it less easy than he had expected to dispose of its arguments, and especially to explain away its Scripture proofs. Having finished the book, he went out for the purpose of seeking a certain friend with whom he had been accustomed to spend the Sunday afternoon in walks about the neighborhood, and in conver-

sation about such stray topics as might present themselves. He sought him now, that he might talk over with him the new thoughts suggested by the book he had read. Failing to find him as usual, he returned to the house, and, taking up the tract again, read it through aloud to his family, consisting of his wife, her father, two brothers and a sister, commenting upon it as he went along, and all uniting in looking out and verifying the Scripture quotations. The result was that both he and they felt compelled to yield the argument, and confess that, so far, the Independents were right.

This incident, from first to last, illustrates some of the peculiarities of Mr. Thomson's character. Inconsistent, even to criminality, as his life was, he still prided himself upon his orthodoxy, upon his official position in the parish church, and even had, underneath all his dissipation and formalism, a real interest in religious things. This interest had shown itself quite early in life. "When old enough," he writes, long after, "to attend the cows in the pasture in spring, having no human companions, my only amusement was learning a large stock of psalms and paraphrases by heart, and, knowing all the sacred tunes then common in that country, to commence with the tunes in order,

with a psalm or a paraphrase to each, and to sing as long as my hours of herding lasted. How vividly do I yet remember that while thus exercised, whenever the matter in the verse treated of the joys of heaven, my attention would be so arrested, and my heart so filled with joy at the expectation of, *myself*, sharing one day in those pleasures, as to compel me to cease."

He had been a docile pupil under the instruction of his parents and the parish minister. Of the divine authority of the "kirk," the infallibility of its ministers, the efficacy of its ordinances, he had never doubted. The minister was like an angel from heaven. He was, too, well-informed upon all those subjects embraced in the catechetical instructions then common. Accordingly, when at the age of seventeen he, with a dozen other young men from the same district, was examined by the minister, with a view to admission to the church, while of the candidates two were refused, Sinclair Thomson was the only one out of the whole number who was mentioned by name as excelling in knowledge. When it is remembered that after this came his wild life at sea, and the still more objectionable courses into which he fell after his marriage, it will be sufficiently evident

that, with all this knowledge and even zeal, there was no sign whatever of real godliness. The facts given, however, explain what we have seen of his interest in controversial questions relating to the church and its ordinances, his zeal for the conversion of those whom he esteemed "out of the way," and his pride in the official position he held in the parish.

God has ever his own best way, both for beginning and for perfecting the work of conversion in any soul. What we have related above concerned only a single question of church practice, and might easily have remained without any noticeable fruit beyond. But God had otherwise purposed. Perhaps it was characteristic of this young man's mind and temper, that he found it impossible to rest here. If wrong in one point, might not the church in which he had been educated be wrong also in others? Since there was one thing, among the many which, in his education, he had received without question, now failing to stand the test of investigation, might there not yet be others, and those more important still? From scrutinizing his belief on this and other points, he fell to a like scrutiny of his motives, and with a like unsatisfactory result. At length he found himself dwelling

upon this train of thought : " I see that I have been wrong in my motives and in my practice, in all religious duties heretofore ; what if I have been wrong with regard to my spiritual state, also ? I find I have taken too much for granted what I have heard from the ministers. My late discoveries show that there is none who teacheth like God." His conclusion was : " I will now, with his help, examine *his book*, that I may find out *the true state of my soul*."

He began with the Gospel by Matthew, and read, attentively, page by page. The Sermon on the Mount especially impressed him. He saw, in the clear light of the Saviour's exposition, how he had broken the law even while claiming to keep it, and how enormous had been his open and manifest transgressions. He felt the burden of the curse ; he saw his peril of everlasting perdition. His soul was filled with distress and anguish. His first resort for comfort was that same which awakened sinners so commonly try. He began with a reformation of his life, and with increased zeal in the performance of outward religious duties. Family worship was commenced at home ; abroad he admonished his neighbors of their sins, and tried to exercise toward them a zeal for God and right-

eousness ; smuggling practices were abandoned ; the Scriptures made a daily study ; and thus he went about to establish his own righteousness, not having yet even heard of that righteousness which is by faith.

All this, as will readily be anticipated, gave him no comfort. Why it should thus fail he did not understand. How he longed for some godly minister in whom he could surely confide, to guide him in the right way ! It was vain to seek relief at the hands of the religious teacher by whom he had been led so far wrong since his childhood, or from any of his class. The "missionary preachers" were twenty-four miles away, in Lerwick. To Lerwick, besides, he dared not go. Press-gangs were there, seizing all who had been seamen and forcing them to enter the naval service of the kingdom. As Thomson had been in the whale-fishery, they would be sure to lay hands on him if he ventured within their reach. He could not go thither. Five months passed in this gloomy, almost despairing condition of mind, the heavens seeming only to gather blackness day by day.

At last the light broke in from a quarter quite unexpected. He had, by some means, gained

possession of one of the hymn-books used by the Independents, and had learned some of their tunes. One day, while engaged in his house at some hand-work, he was singing one of those hymns to himself, almost unconsciously. It was the hymn commencing,

“Hark ! the voice of love and mercy
Sounds aloud from Calvary,
Rending rocks the word attesting,
Shaking earth and veiling sky !
‘It is finished !’
Was the dying Saviour’s cry.”

Nothing in the hymn particularly drew his attention until he came to the last verse :

“Now redemption is completed,
Sin atoned, the curse removed ;
Satan, death, and hell defeated,
As the rising fully proved.
All is finished :
There our hopes do rest unmoved.”

The last line especially impressed him :

“There our hopes do rest unmoved.”

He paused in his work, exclaiming : “Where, where?” He went back over the words of the hymn to ascertain *where* the sinner’s “hopes do rest unmoved.” The Gospel provision shone upon

his mind, the full, blessed beam of the sun of righteousness. He saw in the "finished" work of the dear Lord Jesus the rock on which to build his hope. He perceived the folly of that effort he had been making to atone for past sin, or win present favor, by reforming his life, or by any of those manifestations of zeal not according to knowledge. He looked unto Jesus, and found instant peace. It was peace like a river, flowing on through all his life after, till the ocean of eternal and perfect peace was reached at last.

One can not but be impressed with the remarkable operation of divine grace in this conversion of Sinclair Thomson. The point of Christian practice by which his attention was first arrested, was not of supreme consequence. The Scriptures furnish us no positive rule with reference to the frequency with which the ordinance of the Lord's Supper shall be observed, and the matter seems left to be decided by a wise Christian expediency. It was, however, to one educated as Thomson had been, a point sure to have attention, when presented in the light given it by the practice introduced by the Independents at Lerwick. Probably it affected him, far more than at that time would have done any controversy with reference to the

manner in which sinners are justified and forgiven. Yet we see how the one led to the other. Shaken on one point, from that unscrutinizing faith in which he had been educated, he could not rest till he knew whether on others he had any better reasons to give. Another mind might have required a different dealing. God dealt with *this* mind—quick, earnest, decided, independent in its impulses and tendencies, characterized by real conscientiousness, spite of all the errors and faults of the past—so as to meet it on its own ground, and create within it a new life in the way most in harmony with its own characteristics. It is infinite wisdom, not less than infinite grace, that deals with men when they are led to Christ and salvation.

It should also be added, lest any young reader, especially, may draw an inference calculated to mislead, that this season of depression and gloom which Sinclair Thomson experienced was due to the fact that as yet he had not been taught the one only way of salvation. When he saw it, he entered it at once. Let no one suppose that long-continued sorrow of mind is the necessary characteristic of a genuine conviction, or that it is only after such days and nights of mental anguish that one can be prepared to come to Christ. These have been

characteristics of conviction and conversion in many cases ; but they are always due either to a want of clear knowledge how a sinner may have peace and be saved, or to an obdurate resistance of the Spirit of grace pleading with the hard, unyielding heart. The former is a lack which few in these days can plead in excuse for delay ; the latter is but adding sin to sin. The awakened sinner can not too promptly accept the overture grace makes. Jesus says, "Behold I stand *at the door* and knock." Since that is so, it needs but that the door be opened, and the gracious Guest enters. "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, even the word of faith which we preach, that if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."





IV.

CALLLED OF GOD.



WE will take our way once more to the Spiggie parish church. It is again the Sabbath day, and the minister of the parish is now present. The customary service has been concluded, the people dismissed, all save the church session, the collection just taken according to custom, counted and duly noted down, when, as the persons who have thus remained are about dispersing, the minister rises and states that a matter has been reported to him regarding Sinclair Thomson, that requires investigation. If such an announcement had been made a few months before, when the person mentioned was habitually engaged in the practices described some pages back, it would have been eminently proper. But

now that those practices have been abandoned, and Sinclair Thomson has become as noted for his strict morality, his earnest piety, and his devout attention to all religious duties as he had before been for very opposite qualities, a summons to him to give account of himself before the kirk session seems rather remarkable.

A few words will explain. Very naturally, when Mr. Thompson had come to possess that "precious faith" and that "joy unspeakable" of which we spoke in the last chapter, he became anxious to find those who might be "like-minded," with whom he could enjoy spiritual fellowship. Learning that the parish schoolmaster, who lived some five miles distant, was such a one, he sought his acquaintance, and they very soon became intimate; it would, of course, follow, since the fire of Christian love in any soul ever tends to spread and kindle in all directions, that they could not be satisfied with their own pleasant, mutual communion. They began almost at once to consult together how they might get access to the people about them, and lead them also to this fountain of living waters. An expedient was not hard to find. It was one of the duties of the parish schoolmaster, when he *could* and *would*, to conduct service at the church, in the

absence of the minister. It has before been mentioned that the minister at Spiggie was, on every alternate Sabbath, engaged in another parish. Thomson accordingly proposed to his friend that he should undertake this duty of supplying the place in the minister's absence, reading a sermon from some public collection, as he was not a preacher. Whatever aid he needed in any part of the service, Thomson volunteered to give, especially the singing, which properly fell to him as the precentor. His friend consented, and when the minister was next absent, notice was given that there would be a service held, and the people came together. The schoolmaster prayed, and read one of "Burder's Village Sermons," the other parts of the service being conducted as usual.

It was an occasion of no little interest to the people assembled, who were much pleased, especially those more spiritually inclined. The warm, earnest discourse read was in quite a different strain from the dry, cold sermonizing they were accustomed to, while it was generally remarked that the schoolmaster manifested much more of a praying gift than they had observed in the minister. In planning for the next similar occasion, Thomson's friend proposed to him to offer the prayer. This,

however, he declined to do, feeling too diffident; and having never yet offered prayer in the presence of others, save in his own family ; but he expressed his willingness to read the sermon. It was, therefore, so arranged, and at the proper time Thomson stood up to read it. At the beginning he felt somewhat abashed, but this soon passed away. Entering into the spirit of what he was reading, he almost forgot the presence of his auditors, at least forgot his fear of man, conscious only of the precious truth he was declaring. Coming at length to a place in the discourse where it seemed to him the thought in hand should have been more fully expanded, to the great surprize of the people he closed the book, and went on for several minutes, pursuing in his own language and with great force of speech, the train of remarks thus opened. Then resuming his reading, he continued to the close ; the service ended, and the people were dismissed.

A new thing had occurred. For one not an ordained minister to offer to instruct the people, to teach religion in any form, in the parish church, was what had scarcely been heard of before. There was considerable discussion and criticism, especially among the elders of the church, strenuous as they naturally were for all the rights of official pre-

rogative. What Thomson had said was discoursed upon, and from what he actually did say some inferences drawn, and these last reported to the minister, as representing the style of teaching which his flock were receiving in his absence. He was, of course, disturbed at the intelligence, and, accordingly, stopped the kirk session on the next Sabbath, as mentioned above, with the announcement that Sinclair Thomson was expected to answer for what he had done.

Two of the elders had reported the affair to the minister, and these were now desired to give their version of it. They did so. Thomson was then called upon to explain. This he did by stating precisely what he had said, and repudiating the version of the elders, as being not his language, but their own unauthorized inferences. There was one member of the session between whom and Thomson, some time before, a difficulty had occurred, and who had ever since cherished a grudge against him. He was a man of violent temper, but nevertheless a man who believed in justice and fair dealing. As he rose to his feet, Mr. Thomson expected to find him taking a decided part against him, and was most agreeably disappointed to hear him say,

"I was here, last Lord's day, and heard every word Sinclair Thomson said, and I am now ready to make oath that he has just repeated his own words, without altering one."

"If that be so," said the minister, "and this is the way you spoke, it is not so far wrong."

He then called upon the two accusers to know what they had to say. They replied in some confusion, "We shall not be sure, but we thought it was the other way."

The minister rebuked them for their hasty way of producing charges against a brother in the church, then added some words in a milder tone to Mr. Thomson, to the effect that he must not assume, unauthorized, to teach theology in the kirk, and dismissed the session. On his way home, Thomson had abundant food for reflection. He was astonished at the mildness of the minister; more astonished that where he expected to see an enemy testifying against him, he had found a friend sustaining and acquitting him. But he had now been "forbidden," as Peter and John were, long ago; what should he do in view of this?

So far as the church service was concerned, he had no choice. He made no further attempt to render himself useful there, save in the discharge

of his customary official duties. The attendance there, however, on the Sabbath when the minister was absent, the schoolmaster conducting the worship, fell off seriously, and Mr. Thomson, feeling that the opportunity was not being improved to the best advantage, suggested to his friend that as his own house would hold nearly an hundred persons, if he would lend him the book of sermons he was accustomed to use, and procure another for the service at the church, he himself would hold on the same day a service at his house, where his immediate neighbors could be well accommodated. This was agreed to. On the next Sabbath when the minister was away, Mr. Thomson opened his house for a religious meeting, previous notice having been given, and the place was nearly filled. He went through with the customary exercises, reading a sermon from the book he had procured, and announced at the close that a similar meeting would be held two weeks from that day. Many expressed their pleasure and promised to attend. On the next Wednesday, Mr. Thomson received the following letter from the minister :

“SIR—As you have commenced preacher, it is much below your dignity to be any longer my precentor. I have, therefore, provided myself with another, to free you from an office which must be very disagreeable to a man of your distinguished talents.”

Here was something quite unexpected, and not a little confounding to a modest man. In what had transpired before the session, on the occasion spoken of above, there had been no objection made to any of the proceedings Mr. Thomson had been engaged in, save his own brief address at the time referred to. No objection had been made to the service held at the kirk, and he had anticipated none to that at his own house. But there was no remedy. On the next Sabbath, when the congregation assembled at the church he was present, as usual, but instead of filling his customary place in the precentor's desk, took his seat with his family in the pew. The new precentor officiated. The congregation were taken by surprise, and by no means pleased. When the service was over they gathered about him. "What's the matter?" "Have you refused to precent?" "Has the minister hindered you?" He answered them that he had. "What for?" "Why?" He told them the truth.

"He has said to me it is because I have commenced preaching. I have done no such thing. I only assembled a few of the people in my house last Lord's day, and read a sermon to them."

The people said no more, but shook their heads, significantly, and departed in silence.

A decision was now to be made. Should he yield to the dictation of the minister? or should he go straight on, in the course already begun? His sense of duty would not permit him to do the former; besides, he had already made an appointment for the next Lord's day. He determined to hold the service as arranged, and be guided by what should seem the will of God. Sabbath came, and so many people were in attendance that he was obliged to have his meeting in the open air, the house not being large enough to contain them. Feeling that the minister's recent course had in a degree emancipated him, he resolved to take his own way in the service, and accordingly, in the same manner as before at the church, added some of his own thoughts to what he read from the book. On dismissing the people, he made another appointment in the same place for a fortnight from that day.

In this manner he continued for some six weeks, holding his simple service at his own house each alternate Lord's day, and on the intervening one attending with others at the kirk. At the end of the time mentioned, an incident occurred that led

him to take a step still further in advance. At the conclusion of one of his meetings, a young woman, who had been much interested in the discourse read, came to him, requesting him to lend her the book, promising to return it faithfully before it should be needed again. He gave it to her, with this understanding. The time passed, and he had forgotten the incident. It was the season of harvest, and the young woman, being much engaged, also forgot her promise. The day for his customary service at his house having arrived, and the people beginning to assemble, Mr. Thomson went, according to his custom, into his own room to select a discourse to be read. To his consternation he found, at this last moment, that he had neglected to secure the return of his book.

What should he do? The dilemma brought the perspiration to his brow. It was too late to send for the book. It would not do, to dismiss the people without worship. He decided to open the meeting as usual, and then read a portion of Scripture, with occasional remarks, explaining to the people his reason for this unusual proceeding. He accordingly went out to the room where the congregation had already assembled, and opened

the services. At the point where he had been accustomed to read the sermon selected for the occasion, he took up the Bible instead, and explaining the circumstances in which he was placed, began to read the eighth chapter of John's Gospel. He read to the thirty-sixth verse, and then, closing the book, began some remarks upon the bondage to Satan under which the whole human family lie, and the curse that rests upon men in consequence ; then, the necessity of deliverance from that bondage, by being born again, with the result that must follow if we leave the world without having experienced that change ; lastly, the means provided, through which this translation out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God may be obtained, namely, faith in Christ the Son of God and man's Saviour. He then showed how all such as, by resorting to Christ, arrive at this blessing, are emancipated, and become "free indeed." Before he noticed how time was passing, he had spoken nearly an hour. As the meeting broke up, one and another came to him, saying :

"It was evidently of the Lord that you had not your book to-day. We beg of you never to teach again from an uninspired book, while you have an inspired book at hand."

He felt that the providence of God and the voice of the people had called him. A like call he also heard in the "still, small voice" of the Spirit in his heart. On that day the ministry began, in which, for more than fifty years, he "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

There had been decided evidence that, however frowned upon by the minister and session of the parish, the work in which Mr. Thomson had been thus engaged was owned of God. Several persons had come to him for conversation upon the subject of personal religion. Eight, he had reason to believe, had experienced a saving change. These were "seals of his ministry," confirmations of his faith that the Great Master had given him here work to do. But the decision to which he had now come involved consequences other than those immediately personal to himself. What should he do with this "little flock" which now evidently desired to have him as their shepherd and spiritual guide? That the parish kirk would recognize his proceedings was not to be hoped. He had up to this time fully shared with others their dislike of dissent. We have seen how, not long before, he had felt himself called upon to sharply rebuke one who had separated

herself from the kirk. And still, he saw that for him the parish church was no longer a spiritual home. For those whom he had been also made the means of leading to higher ground in spiritual things, it offered none of the fellowship and help they needed. His larger experience of the Gospel, too, had brought him to a point where his views on all religious questions began to be enlarged, and he became dissatisfied with the narrowness and rigor, the formality and stiffness, the secular aspects and entanglements of the Established Church.

About this time his attention was directed to the fifth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, and the sixth chapter of the second epistle. He found there what he felt himself justified in regarding as ample authority for dissent; principles, set forth, indeed, which to him and his brethren in their circumstances, made dissent a duty. His thoughts upon this subject he made known to the little band of faithful ones who had gathered about him. For several weeks they earnestly searched the Scriptures to ascertain their duty, looking prayerfully to God for guidance. He had now commenced stated Sabbath meetings in his own house. As his position became more

decided, in its independence of the kirk authority, many of those who had frequented his service absented themselves, but enough remained to encourage him in his "well-doing."

Mr. Thomson has himself described the anxious deliberations of those days, and the conclusion in which they terminated, as follows :

"The parish, in general, smiled upon my humble proceedings, while it pointed the finger, of scorn at Dissenters. Absurd reports had been circulated all through the country by the enemies of those who had left the Established Church. Whenever we 'conferred with flesh and blood,' we were reminded that should we dissent, the people would look upon us as heretics ; our influence then upon 'those without' and efforts for their salvation would come to nothing. In addition, many reports current with reference to the 'missionaries'—and all Dissenters went by that name—exhibited them as silly and superstitious. If those reports were true, and those characteristics were a necessary feature of dissent, it were better to remain as we were. Yet when we looked at the divine mandate, 'But now I have written unto you not to keep company,' etc. ; and again, 'Wherefore put away from among you that wicked person ;' and again,

'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean, and I will receive you ;' I say, finding ourselves thus directed by the Holy Spirit, we were obliged to come to the conclusion that to remain as we were would be to disobey Him who had 'bought us with his own blood,' a sin for which we could have no 'cloak,' seeing 'God had showed it unto us.'"

These discussions eventuated in the separation of Mr. Thomson and his friends from the parish church, and their organization as an independent congregation. Mr. Thomson himself could not at first find courage to accept a formal designation to the work of the ministry ; yet, as will be seen, he had already, however little conscious of it himself, been by higher than human authority thus called and set apart, being from this time forth truly "separated unto the Gospel of God."





V.

FIRST FRUITS.



ABOUT four hundred yards from Mr. Thomson's dwelling, in Spiggie, there was an unoccupied building, formerly used as a store. Fishing materials, hardware, and especially ardent spirits, had been the stock in trade while it flourished as a place of traffic ; but it had now stood so long unused that the thatched roof had decayed, while even the walls had begun to crumble. The owner of it lived about two miles distant. It was a small building, only thirty feet by eleven ; yet as the little congregation Mr. Thomson had gathered about him began to grow, and other accommodations became inadequate, the question presented itself, might not this place be fitted up

and made convenient and comfortable for purposes of worship ?

Some provision of the kind had become a necessity. On the first Sabbath that the little flock met in avowed separation from the parish church only seven were present. On the next, no service being held at the kirk, the house was filled. On the next, about a dozen came. Thus they went on through the winter and spring, the regular attendance slowly increasing, even when the parish minister was at home, and a crowded house when he was absent. As the spring advanced, and the weather became such as to permit, the congregation were assembled outside, when too numerous to be accommodated indoors. It was proposed to Mr. Thomson that an effort should be made to secure the parish meeting-house for the alternate Sabbaths. To this he would not consent, feeling that it was better to take a stand entirely independent, as any thing like real fellowship was out of the question. This pressure of necessity led to the suggestion that the building named above should be procured, and put in condition for use.

The owner of the house being applied to on the subject, consented that it should be taken for the purpose named, and prepared for use as the people

might desire, on condition that if again wanted for a store it should be given up, without any refunding of whatever might have been expended in repairing its dilapidations. These were rather precarious conditions, but it was the best thing that offered. The work of renovation was accordingly commenced, and after an expenditure of about six pounds sterling, the house was made very comfortable for the accommodation of some one hundred persons. A new thatch roof had been put on, with three skylights, a door, and the necessary seats, rudely constructed. It was not a splendid temple, but it was "the house of God," and to many souls it became "the gate of heaven."

The day of dedication was a day memorable to the Baptists of Shetland. As yet, indeed, neither Mr. Thomson nor any of his flock had ever heard of the Baptists. The subject of ordinances and church government had not yet presented itself to their minds ; scarcely that of their own organization as a separate society. Thus far, they had thought of only this—that in the Church of the Establishment they saw such formalism, such worldliness, such a deficiency of spiritual religion and of the means to cultivate it, as compelled them to seek in other ways and elsewhere for the bread

of life. The "little flock" had turned to Mr. Thomson as a religious teacher in whose heart was the love of Christ, and whom God had gifted with singular power in presenting the saving truth of the Gospel. Up to this time, they had provided for only this, that they might meet, unmolested, with such as should be drawn to associate with them, to worship God as the Spirit dictated, and be instructed out of the living Word. But this was all the same the beginning of Baptist history in Shetland. In a little time, as we shall see, other questions came to be weighed and decided, issuing in the adoption of Baptist views, even while still unaware that such a denomination as the Baptists was in existence.

It was a bright day in summer, in the year 1810, that the Spiggie brethren set apart for God and his worship their humble sanctuary. There was no formal, ceremonious dedication. The prayers of the brethren were the only act of consecration, mingled with their hymns of praise. So touched were they with joy and gratefulness, so deeply sensible of the great grace of God to them, in giving them a vine under which to worship unmolested, that one and another, as he attempted to pray, would burst into joyful, thankful tears. On

the following Sabbath, the parish minister being absent, a great number assembled. The people flocked from far and near. When the first prayer was ended, the house had become so crowded, many also being about the door, and more constantly arriving, that it was found necessary to adjourn the service to the open air. Mr. Thomson, in preaching, felt all the inspiration of the occasion. At least five hundred persons were present, and as he held forth to them the precious truth, hearts were touched, consciences aroused, and the Word was proved to be "in demonstration of the Spirit and with power." It afterward appeared that several were effectually awakened on that day, and induced to seek till they found a sure and saving hope in Christ. Like seasons were enjoyed on subsequent occasions, the regular, stated attendance at the chapel increasing, while there were not a few whose hearts the Lord touched.

Some time in the summer when these events took place, Mr. Thomson became a member of an Independent church about forty miles distant. During the following winter the meetings at Spiggie went on as usual ; but in April, the press-gang at Lerwick having been withdrawn, Mr. Thomson found he could safely visit that place, and did so.

He transferred his membership to the Lerwick church, and made arrangements for an occasional visit from the Lerwick pastor. In a few weeks the Lerwick brother came, when an Independent church was organized with eighteen members, and the little company, after being deprived of that privilege for many months, sat down together at the table of the Lord.

All this time Mr. Thomson's mind was by no means settled as to his own personal duty. The thought of giving himself to the ministry of the Gospel, dearly as he loved the work, was a burden to him. He felt what many another one has felt, "I am a child; I can not speak." He was oppressed by a consciousness of most deficient preparation. Two months at one time, two weeks at another, had been the full measure of his opportunity for school education. He had not a book in the world save his Bible, a hymn book used by the Independents, and a few tracts which had come in his way as they straggled through the country. He had a family to support, in the cultivation of his little farm of five acres, and by fishing. He had now two children, the youngest being two years of age. Just about this time, too, he was obliged to give up the house he had occupied, and

build another, with such other buildings as his farm work required. Four months in the year it was necessary for him to be at sea in his fishing-boat from Monday morning till Saturday night, and in the other parts of the year every moment was required in necessary labor on the farm. How was it possible for him in these circumstances to surmount all the disadvantages of a defective education, care suitably for the flock of God, and feed them with judicious fare?

Meanwhile his people clung to him. Whenever he hinted at the subject of yielding his place to another, their tearful remonstrances made such a step impossible. On his occasional visits at Lerwick, besides, he was always claimed for some service on the Lord's day, and such a unanimous conviction of his call to the work had possessed the minds of his brethren both there and in Spiggie, that he saw himself left without any door of retreat. He resolved to make an effort at supplying his deficiencies. What these were his own words will best indicate :

‘ I could, it is true, read with ease any thing in print that fell into my hands in the English language. But that was almost all I had acquired. In the writing department it would have been .a

puzzle to read the shortest note I might have written upon any subject, and as to spelling I was little better instructed. In arithmetic I had managed when at school the four compound rules. I had not then, as I remember, ever heard the word grammar."

It shows the resolute character of the man, that amidst such disadvantages as we have shown, and with this small stock of scholarship to begin upon, he still determined to set about systematic effort at mental improvement. Evidently, his time for this must be found in those hours when other people were asleep. All the working-hours, of both day and night, were claimed from him by the wants of his family. He had been accustomed to rise at between four and five in the morning. He now fixed his hour of rising at between two and three. "For fully sixteen years subsequently," he says, "I do not remember being in bed, when at home and in health, after three o'clock." "In the hours thus stolen from sleep," he adds, "I obtained all the mental cultivation I this moment enjoy over the general class of the fishermen in my country, with the exception of what every person who has got a start may obtain by the reading of newspapers and other periodicals."

These hours of study he devoted, first, to the very rudiments of education, as well as to the Scriptures. Subsequently his range of reading and study enlarged, embracing every thing upon which he could lay his hand likely to improve his mind or aid him in his work. When we add that besides these studies, the work on the farm, and the fishing which was no less necessary, he was accustomed for a series of years to preach four and often five times each week, with frequent preaching tours all over Shetland, it will be conceded that few men have been more laborious or more resolute in grappling with disadvantages and obstacles. To the end of his life, the necessity for labor upon his farm and in his boat more or less continued, although in his later years not so pressing.

It was under such auspices that the public life of the Shetland apostle began. During the fifty years that followed, he preached more than six thousand sermons, and travelled so extensively that there are few spots in Shetland where his name is not familiar, while in many a one the prints of his feet, almost the echoes of his voice, might be said to still remain.



VI.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION DECIDED.



PASSING over five years, and coming forward to the month of August, in 1815, we find a scene transpiring at Spiggie which indicates that important changes have, meantime, taken place. It is a beautiful summer Sabbath, and a large assembly, numbering at least six hundred persons, is gathered upon the banks of the lovely little lake, the Loch of Spiggie, only a few rods from Mr. Thomson's door. After a brief service at the water side, two men walk down, hand in hand, into the lake, and, for the first time in all its history, Shetland has witnessed the administration of the rite of scriptural immersion. This scene needs explanation, which may be found in a brief recital of events during the five years just mentioned.

The brethren at Spiggie had been organized as a branch of the Independent Church at Lerwick with eighteen members. In the summer of 1812, on the occasion of another visit of the Lerwick pastor, eighteen more were received. At this time, the mutual relations of the Spiggie and Lerwick brethren were most pleasant. An interruption of that harmony, however, was impending. Something of Mr. Thomson's mental tendency, where questions of religious faith and practice were concerned, has already appeared, in what was related of the circumstances of his conversion. It was his nature to be impatient of all obscurity in treating such subjects, while neither human testimony nor human authority could satisfy him, where a truth in religion was to be taught, or a duty enjoined. So far as regarded those grounds upon which the Independents had separated from the Establishment, he felt that those brethren were fully sustained by the Word of God. That religion should be a personal thing, rooted in each one's experience of the grace of God in conversion; that the mere fact of church-membership, of deriving one's birth from a godly parentage, of "consecrated" hands laid on in baptism, or or admission to communion at the Lord's Supper—that these

could never constitute one a Christian, nor afford any guarantee of being in a state of salvation, he, in common with his Independent brethren, thoroughly realized. He agreed with them, likewise, that the scriptural church organization, while simple in itself, utterly forbade such a connection with the State as must exist in every "Establishment." Such an association, he and they alike felt, could never be made to harmonize with the Lord's familiar declaration: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." The government of the church they saw to be *in* the church, and its official appointments all comprehended in the two offices of pastor and deacon.

Here Mr. Thompson's brethren were quite contented to pause. He was not. This practice of "searching the Scriptures whether these things were so," had with him, results further on. "Ever since," he writes, "I had come under the impression that the New Testament ought to be the particular guide of the church, in its formation and practice, I suspected that she had lost her way in the matter of Christian baptism. When, or how, I could not tell, as I was quite unacquainted with her history." He saw the prevalent practice to be hopelessly in conflict with the fundamental idea

held by his brethren, the Independents, that religion is pre-eminently a personal matter. In the New Testament he had read : "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved." "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins." In his own case, this act of baptism, set in the terms of salvation in such close and vital connection with the requirements of faith and repentance, had been, at least in the view of those at whose hands he had received it, performed while he was an infant, and utterly incapable of either repentance or faith. It seemed inconceivable to him that a scriptural practice could be so utterly out of conformity with scriptural precept.

Besides, he reasoned, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." It was impossible that the infant should have faith, and equally impossible that either sponsor or administrator should exercise faith in its behalf. How can one act for another, in the matters that lie so entirely between God and the soul? But then, are we to suppose that an act which was "sin" when performed, "faith" being impossible, is accepted afterward as a duty done? Then the form used in baptism was to his mind wholly inconsistent with the Scripture narrative. He could not see in the touch of a wet finger on

an infant's forehead, the counterpart of that impressive scene when John and Jesus stood together in the midst of Jordan, and when, after he had been baptized, as Jesus "went up out of the water," the Spirit in form of a dove descended upon him. In short, the same process of inquiry which in respect to church government made him a Congregationalist, in respect to ordinances made him a Baptist.

At this time, Mr. Thomson had never heard of the Baptists. How far his own views were shared by Christians in any other part of the world, he had no means of knowing. In Shetland he stood alone. He was surprised and grieved, too, when he saw that the bare mention of his doubts seemed to disturb the friendly relations in which he had before stood to his Lerwick brethren. Not only did they not sympathize with him in any of his difficulties, but they seemed to regard the inquiry itself after a more Scriptural practice as an offence. It was painful to be in this position. Mr. Thomson had regarded his Lerwick brethren as spiritual guides. He had looked to them as competent, by their larger experience and their better culture, to teach him in the things of religion. To avow even doubts upon points where they were so positive,

much more to take a position of actual dissent, seemed like self-assumption. Indeed he did not escape the reproach of such a fault, particularly as his own attitude became more decided on the points in question.

But relief and sympathy were soon to come. At one of his many interviews with the Independent pastor at Lerwick, the fact came out in the course of conversation, that there was a people holding the views to which Mr. Thomson seemed inclined, and called by the name of "Baptists," and that they had churches and ministers in Edinburgh. He now became desirous, if possible, to get into communication with the Edinburgh Baptists. While revolving expedients to this end, a book came providentially into his hands, written by Mr. Innes, an eminent Baptist minister in that city. "It was," says Mr. Thomson, "the first human writing on that side of the subject I had ever seen, and the most acceptable uninspired volume ever put into my hands." The reading of this book, in which he found a very thorough discussion of the whole subject, confirmed him in the convictions he had formed in his own unaided investigations, and greatly consoled him by making him know that in holding these convictions he

was in sympathy with good men and servants of the Lord Jesus elsewhere.

Edinburgh is three hundred miles from Shetland. The way to reach it was by sea : usually a rough and dangerous voyage. Mr. Thomson had come to feel that he must receive the rite of Baptism at the hands of some qualified person, and none was nearer to him than Edinburgh. He wrote to Mr. Innes, inquiring if either he or some other person would come to Shetland for this purpose. Mr. Innes replied that neither would be possible, but assured Mr. Thomson that if he would come to Edinburgh, himself, his expenses should be paid. He joyfully accepted the proposal, and in the summer of 1814 began making his preparations.

This plan, however, for reasons in Providence which we shall see in due time, was not to succeed. In October of the year just named, he went to Lerwick, and engaged a passage to Edinburgh. The vessel was an old fishing smack, deeply laden with salt fish and beaf barrels ; of doubtful sea-worthiness at the best. Then the season was already late, and a stormy voyage might be looked for. Nevertheless, they set sail, after being detained in harbor a week by foul weather. As they

got out to sea the storm increased upon them so much that they were driven back, and the same evening were again at Lerwick. They waited about ten days more and again sailed. For forty days they maintained their resolute battle with contrary winds and a rough sea, making about seventy miles of distance in that time. Finding, then, that their vessel had sprung a leak, they put about, and after a run of three days and a half, anchored once more in the harbor of Lerwick.

It began, now, to seem to Mr. Thomson and to others, that for some reason Providence did not favor his plan of a visit to Edinburgh on the errand in question. As to the reason itself, however, opinions varied. Those who had censured his course in breaking away from his brethren of the Independent connection on matters of ordinances, viewed these late events as indications of Divine disapproval. To Mr. Thomson, and to those who sympathized with him, on the other hand, it was simply apparent that there was some good end to be served, in due time sure to appear, in this disappointment of his wish with regard to receiving the ordinance of Baptism at Edinburgh. He returned contentedly to his home and his work, patiently waiting God's time.

Winter passed again, and spring and summer had come once more. One evening in August, a stranger came to his door. Received with the hospitality invariable in a Shetland home, the guest very soon made himself known. He was from Edinburgh, a member of Mr. Haldane's church, and a Baptist minister. He was, however, a native of Shetland ; had been in the army some twenty years ; had been converted, and had commenced preaching while a soldier. He had now come on a visit to his native islands. Of Mr. Thomson he had never heard, until his arrival at Lerwick on the previous day. The late course of the Spiggie pastor was still so much a theme of public discussion in that place, that he could not fail to learn the circumstances, which he did almost immediately on his arrival. Changing his original intention, which had been to take a boat northward on the next day, he came instead to Spiggie to see and help his brother in the faith. That he was most welcome, need not be said.

It was Friday evening that he arrived. Next day, Saturday, he preached at the Spiggie chapel, and at the conclusion stated that he would preach again on the following day. On Sabbath, accordingly, he again officiated at the chapel, at the close an-

nouncing that the ordinance of baptism was to be immediately administered in the lake near by. The assembly, a very large one as before stated, repaired to the water-side, and Sinclair Thomson, the first Shetland Baptist, was immersed, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It was a deeply impressive scene, and the effects that followed it showed plainly enough why Mr. Thomson had been providentially so disappointed in his wish to be baptized in Edinburgh. In countries where the administration of the rite is common, conviction of its Scriptural character, and deep impressions of the truths it symbolizes are frequent experiences in those who witness it, especially if it be for the first time. That it should have been so in Shetland need surprise no one. Those who went home on that day, from the pleasant lake-side, which with the transaction there must have reminded them of Ænon and Jordan of old, and opening their Bibles at the familiar narratives of the baptisms there recorded, brought the ancient and the recent scenes into comparison with each other, could not fail to be struck with the resemblance. More than one Baptist was made that day by the Loch of Spiggie, and very soon Sinclair Thomson had the satisfaction of knowing that he no longer stood alone.

It is to be regretted that we can not give the name of this messenger of Providence to the Spiggie pastor, in his hour of need. The whole history of this introduction of a more scriptural practice and faith into Shetland will impress the reader, we think, as remarkably characterized by interventions of Providence ; and none of them more signal than this of which we have been speaking. The example of their spiritual teacher was to the people worshipping in the humble Spiggie chapel, far more weighty than any argument could have been, while the opportunity to witness this rite, under circumstances so impressive, sealed conviction. Within a few months Mr. Thomson had baptized twenty-three, many of whom spoke of his own baptism as having either excited their attention as never before, or convinced them that as there is "One Lord" and "One Faith," so is there "One Baptism," and that the Baptism in which Jesus himself has set the example of "fulfilling all righteousness." In bringing about these results, the stranger who came thus opportunely as a messenger and instrument of God, had a very noticeable share. We regret that he must go unnamed in these pages ; yet he is not unnamed,

we confidently believe, on the brighter page of the Book of Life.

Tidings of these events at Spiggie traveled swift-footed to Lerwick. On the very next Wednesday, a messenger from that place was present at the evening meeting, commissioned to say, that in view of what had taken place, the Lerwick church had withdrawn its fellowship. No harm was done by this announcement. The decision of some to put on Christ by similar baptism was perhaps delayed, but not prevented. The little band, too, thrown upon their own resources, and standing alone, rejected on the one hand by the Establishment and on the other by those with whom they had lately been in fellowship, though for a moment staggered and at a loss, yet in the end looked only the more earnestly to God for help and direction. They obtained both, and sustained and, guided thereby they "continue unto this day." At the end of twelve months, twenty-four had been baptized at Spiggie, including Mr. Thomson. He himself administered the ordinance to those who thus followed his own example. It soon became apparent to both him and them that they had further steps to take. They had no one to administer to them the Lord's Supper. Must they for this

reason forego the privilege? They determined to proceed upon their own responsibility. They organized as a church, and Mr. Thomson administered to them the Communion, of which they partook with humble, grateful joy.

As yet the Spiggie pastor had not received ordination. Of course, tested by the rule applicable in ordinary circumstances, there has been some irregularity in the proceedings just described. Where practicable, it is no doubt desirable that before one shall take upon himself the administration of ordinances, he shall have been formally set apart to that duty, and to the stated preaching of the Word, by the laying on of hands. There is, however, nothing, in either the New Testament rule, or the New Testament practice, to make this method a positively binding one, admitting of no exception. The fact that it has not been made thus binding we see explained in just such circumstances as those in which the Shetland Baptists were placed. There was no "presbytery" accessible to them, to lay their hands on their pastor. Their little church had sprung up in that remote corner, and there was no resource but to apply in their own case that principle which derives church authority from the Lord himself, and which per-

ceives in the true minister's call of God his real credentials. Accordingly, they proceeded in a way simple and primitive, yet strikingly in keeping with the fundamental idea of both the church and the ministry. We quote here Mr. Thomson's words :

“ Having been rejected by our former friends, for conscience sake, and not aware of any person from any other country likely to visit us, far less to settle with us a leader, or pastor, we were driven to do the best we could under the circumstances. In our consultations we came to the conclusion that as all the sacred responsibilities of a church connection devolved upon us already, with the exception of breaking of bread, and looking at that ordinance in its plain, simple nature and order we found our conscience would no longer acquit us in living in neglect of the explicit command, ‘ Do this in remembrance of me.’ We then resolved to add to the ordinance we had already observed, the breaking of bread every first day of the week. The twenty-four then baptized were thus united in a church capacity, as a result of the severe measures of the church at Lerwick.

“ About one week after we had thus become a church our brethren decided to organize after the

scriptural order. They also chose me as their pastor. As we were beyond the reach of preaching brethren who could ordain me by the laying on of hands, we agreed to proceed with the ordination after the following simple manner: A day was appointed for humiliation and prayer, in connection with fasting. After the preliminary exercises, a brother arose, and in the name of the church desired me to take the oversight of them in the name of the Lord. Then he sat down. I stood up and said that before I could make any response to the request thus made, I wished to ascertain whether the desire thus uttered was the unanimous sentiment of the church. As a test, therefore, I requested as many as sincerely wished that I should become their pastor, to hold up their right hands. Every right hand was immediately raised. I then signified to them my acceptance of the call, and addressed them upon the solemn nature of the connection now formed between us."

This took place in 1815, and to the day of his death, a period of some forty-six years, he remained the pastor of the Spiggie church,

"Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his place."

Surely, no one since Paul's day could more

truthfully deem himself "an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and by God the Father who raised him from the dead."





VII.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH.



It is not our purpose to sketch minutely the career of public service upon which Mr. Thomson had now fairly entered. Neither the limits which we have fixed for our narrative, nor the material we have at hand will permit such an amount of detail. Indeed it would be impossible now, to gather up a minute record of labours performed so absolutely without view to any record save that which is made in heaven of true life and of all faithful service, and whose sphere was so retired. There are, however, certain salient outlines which may be traced, and which, however partial and defective the sketch

may seem, will yet in some degree fairly represent our Shetland apostle's ministry as a whole.

A notable feature of this earnest and self-denying ministry was its staunch and rugged advocacy of the simple, plain Gospel. With all its faults, it must be conceded to the Established Church of Scotland that, so far as its doctrinal teaching was concerned, it had maintained with much fidelity the strong scriptural forms of what is termed "Calvinism." The doctrines of grace had formed the basis of Mr. Thomson's religious training, both at home and in the "kirk;" and when, practically applying these doctrines more faithfully than his teachers had been wont to do, he became an experimental Christian, when, cast off from this communion, he became a Dissenter and a Baptist, he clung to them still. The Gospel which Shetland heard from his lips was the Gospel of the New Testament; not diluted, in order to adapt it to the weak, modern stomach; not garnished with human additions, in order to take away the offence of its plainness and simplicity; not softened and enfeebled, lest it should wound too deeply the consciences of sinners. An example of his way of viewing things may be found in a passage from one of his letters, written in 1845. He says:

“ You will be aware that a split has taken place among the Independents of Scotland, upon the subject of the Atonement. Dr. Wardlaw published a book lately, in which he advocates the universality of the atonement made by the death of Christ—that it was made alike for *all* men—and at the same time with unparalleled inconsistency maintains that none but the elect of God can receive the Gospel to the saving of the soul. Some of the Doctor’s pupils have seen further through his sentiments than himself. Hence, last summer, nine students in the Theological Academy at Glasgow, were expelled the institution in consequence of having added to the Doctor’s theory the legitimate grounds that with general redemption general capability had been imparted to *all* to receive the Gospel ; and that no such thing as the operation of the Holy Spirit is either promised, or required, in order to conversion. This, the Doctor and his particular fraternity thought, was going too far. Hence the young men were cut off from the privileges of the Academy, and from preaching in connection with the Independent body ; while, strangely enough, they are still considered as members of the churches, and allowed to hold fellowship in the ordinance of the Supper.

"The Doctor's theory," he adds, "of the universality of the atonement has run like wild-fire through the length and breadth of the land, until it is as rare, now, to hear the doctrines of sovereign grace drop from the lips of a preacher as it would have been, thirty years ago, to hear the reverse. All parties are more or less tinctured with it—I mean in every county in Great Britain—with the exception of the 'Close-Communion Baptists;' and as the few Baptists in Shetland are providentially of that denomination, they have as yet been graciously sheltered from the delusion."

The tone and substance of Mr. Thomson's preaching may very fairly be inferred from the above extract. Joined with this steadfast devotion to the robust tenets which the Reformers taught, and in whose behalf the Martyrs of the Covenant had suffered, was a thorough dislike of all that seemed like wordly conformity in the arrangements and methods of public worship. We may admit that he carried this too far, without lessening any reader's respect for him as a man and a minister. The following extract from another letter seems quaint in its notions of things, yet was dictated, no doubt, by his distaste for every thing that appeared like an attempt to make favor with an

ungodly world. The letter from which we quote was written in 1840 :

“ Mr. Reid and the Church (Independent) at Lerwick have split, no more to unite upon earth. They have had a succession of young clergymen supplying them with preaching, one after another, until a few weeks back, when a young man from Scotland was set apart to the pastoral office among them. Their neat and commodious chapel, for his gratification, had to be unroofed ; one side set out, so as to make it some six or eight feet broader ; the east gable taken down, and two windows, three feet high, put into it from the wall-head upwards, with a pillar between them, upon which the pulpit is to be hung ; the last bit of plenishing (furniture) taken out ; the walls, as well as the ceiling, lathed and plastered ; the west gable bored in the centre and the entrance door put there, and the whole floor laid of wood, before either seating or galleries are put in. In short, the present repairs it is undergoing are estimated at £450 (\$2,250), and all to please the young pastor !”

One might grant that the Lerwick church and minister, in making these improvements, were acting quite judiciously, and yet honor, all the same, the rugged simplicity of the Baptist pastor, who

would hold them in very light estimation, and be quite as well pleased without them as with them, so that the place where he preached should contain the people who came to hear, and shelter them comfortably from sun and rain. Indeed, as will appear in due time, God's heavens were roof enough for him, and the green amphitheatre in some island dell sanctuary most acceptable, when no other could be had.

From an allusion in the first of the above extracts the reader has perceived that the church at Spiggie, and the Shetland churches generally, as from time to time they were organized, practiced strict communion. It would seem that some time elapsed after Mr. Thomson and his brethren became Baptists, before this subject began to receive their very particular attention. At the outset, however, the principle upon which the strict-communion practice proceeds, was recognized. Speaking, in one place, of his own early convictions on this subject Mr. Thomson says : " I saw, clearly, that, in the order of Scripture, Baptism is before the Lord's Supper, yet I had all along been observing the latter without the former." So far as appears, as the Spiggie pastor and his brethren had for some time groped their way after the truth without even

knowing that there were such a people as Baptists in the world, so a considerable interval passed before the distinction of "Close-Communion" and "Open-Communion" drew their attention.

The point was not likely to become very speedily a practical one with them. Neither the Presbyterians, nor the Independents, nor the Methodists, on the introduction of that form of faith, were likely to seek communion at the Lord's Supper with the Baptists, whom, however much they differed amongst themselves on other points, they agreed in cordially disliking, nor to take serious offence if it were declined. The first of Mr. Thomson's letters in which we find this subject alluded to, was written in 1842. He says, in that, referring to the assaults and annoyances experienced from other denominations: "We are now upon the eve of becoming a 'Close-Communion Church,' which will doubtless not increase our popularity: but the Lord will do what seemeth good in his sight." In 1845, as appears by the first of our quotations in this chapter, we find him speaking of the Baptists of Shetland as being thus "providentially" Close-Communion. The truth seems to be, not that Mr. Thomson and his brethren were ever really in doubt upon this question, but that many

years elapsed,—so rare and so limited were their associations with Baptists elsewhere, while their intercourse with other denominations, even in Shetland, was still more so—before this question became a practical one with them.

How it was decided when at last it did come up is evident. The plain scriptural principle which had impressed Mr. Thompson so strongly at the first, “that Baptism is before the Lord’s Supper,” left only one conclusion possible. To hold this principle and still receive to the Communion those whose sole pretension to be baptized persons lay in the fact that they had been sprinkled in infancy, would be to condemn their own past course. For if infant sprinkling is baptism, why had the Baptists of Shetland broken all these old ties, and submitted to be “a sect everywhere spoken against?” If this kind of baptism sufficed for others, why not for them? It was plain that their position and their testimony, as Baptists, must be unqualified, their separation complete, or their own whole course stood condemned, and the truth they loved subject to reproach. They could not consistently hold to immersion as the only Scriptural baptism, and at the same time recognize the so-called baptism of the other sects, by communing with them. On the

other hand, to yield that first principle "that Baptism is before the Lord's Supper" was to close the eye against the manifest sense of Scripture, and turn to confusion the beautiful order of the Lord's house. And so it came to pass that the Shetland Baptists, when the time had arrived for them to declare their views on this question, stood forth boldly and unanimously as Strict-Communionists.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that, as a Baptist, Mr. Thompson had his full share of reproach and opposition to encounter. At first the rather scornful inquiry was, "What do these feeble" Baptists? But the time for contempt, masked under its thin veil of condescending pity, very soon passed. Other parts of Shetland began to hear the earnest preacher's voice; in other of the islands besides that where the first church arose other churches were planted; the baptisms administered in lochs and streams were attended often by hundreds of witnesses, who were as often seen returning, not in any spirit of mockery or jesting, but impressed and serious. Describing one of these scenes at the Loch of Burgawater, Mr. Thompson says: "At the time appointed we went to the spot, when the ordinance was administered in the presence of three hundred spectators. The

greatest solemnity appeared almost in every countenance, and I was told by a brother afterwards, that while I was administering the ordinance many males shed tears copiously, and few females on the spot could abstain from weeping while I addressed them." Another similar scene which occurred at Scallaway, Mr Thomson thus describes :

"I went there on Saturday, reached through about six P.M., and after tea went with a brother to the 'Lough (Loch) of Asta,' fully a mile off, and examined the conveniences, which I found would answer well. We returned to the town about day-set, and although no public intimation was given, we were met at the water-side next morning, by fully two hundred persons. The weather was favorable, and as there was such a number present, the greater part of whom had never before witnessed a scriptural baptism, I opened the services by singing an appropriate hymn, then prayer, and then for about twenty minutes addressed, first the public, then the brethren, then the candidates, after which I immersed the latter. Although the greater part of the spectators had never seen any thing of the kind before, I must do them the justice to say that they acted with the utmost decorum. Not a smile was ob-

served on the countenance of any individual, and many shed tears ; even some of the Independents, who acknowledged afterwards that they came to the place only that they might be able to ridicule the rite, were among the first whose eyes began to flow."

Such incidents could not fail to make lasting impressions, and those who had professed at one time to regard the Baptists as of too little account to be much noticed, soon found them of sufficient importance to persecute. The method adopted was the characteristic one of misrepresentation. Thus, at one time the charges against the Baptists had assumed a four-fold form, as follows : *first*, that they held to the tenet, "If no immersion, no salvation ;" *second*, that they set aside the Old Testament ; *third*, that they unchristianized all save themselves ; *fourth*, that they had become "proselyters." The last charge, of course, was a clue to all the rest. These accusations, often "railing" ones, the Baptists were compelled to meet, and the prejudices to which they gave rise, partly by public protestation and proof, partly by the more quiet, but scarcely less emphatic testimony of their Christian example. Occasionally, the opposition took a form to require caustic treatment. We may describe one such case.

On the island of Burra, eight miles from Mr. Thomson's residence, a Baptist church has been organized, with Mr. John Inkster as pastor. Among those baptized there on a certain occasion were two women who had before attended for a few times the Methodist class-meeting. The people of that persuasion on the island took the alarm, and sent for one of their preachers to come over and stay the infection, if possible. He came and preached, accordingly, railing at the Baptists in such terms as drew from Mr. Thomson the following letter :

"SIR,—Though I do not, in general, approve of writing upon what we in this country term 'hear-says,' that is, on verbal reports, yet as something of that kind has lately come to my ears which I consider, if true, too serious and too public to wink at, you will, I hope, excuse the liberty I take in writing you upon the subject. If it be a false report I am now about to recite to you, then, as a matter of course, it falls to the ground. I am informed that upon last Lord's day you were in Burra Isle, and from the pulpit of the Methodist chapel there brought against us a 'railing accusation;' viz., that the Baptists had stolen away your members, and had converted none; and further that you desired your hearers to give your compliments to John Inkster and Sinclair Thomson, and to tell them that if they had any wish to discuss the subject of Baptism to meet you at any place

they should choose, and defend their principles, if they could.

"Now, Sir, if the above report is correct, and if your allusion as to *stealing* be to any or all the persons baptized by Brother Inkster, on last Sabbath was a fortnight, the accusation will meet its merited refutation in time and place convenient. As to your challenge, I beg to inform you that I have not been bred a religious duellist; and as a public debate upon a theological subject appears to me as foreign to 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ,' I not only decline, but detest, a challenge of the kind. But I will readily grant you an equivalent. If you, Sir, wish the subject of Baptism to be more fully and more publicly discussed in Burra, I request you will have the goodness to give timely and regular intimation to the inhabitants of these islands, what day and at what hour you will occupy *our* place of worship there, when I shall, so far as my influence can go, guarantee a hearing of your sermon, or lecture, on Baptism by all my friends there. Nor shall you meet with the least opposition or contradiction on the spot, but shall be allowed to go away quietly. But observe, Sir, that your accepting the above offer, and acting accordingly, is under the plain understanding that if either Brother Inkster or myself chooses to occupy the Methodist chapel and pulpit in Burra, for the purpose of declaring to such as choose to hear us our views on the same subject, we are to be at equal liberty to do so.

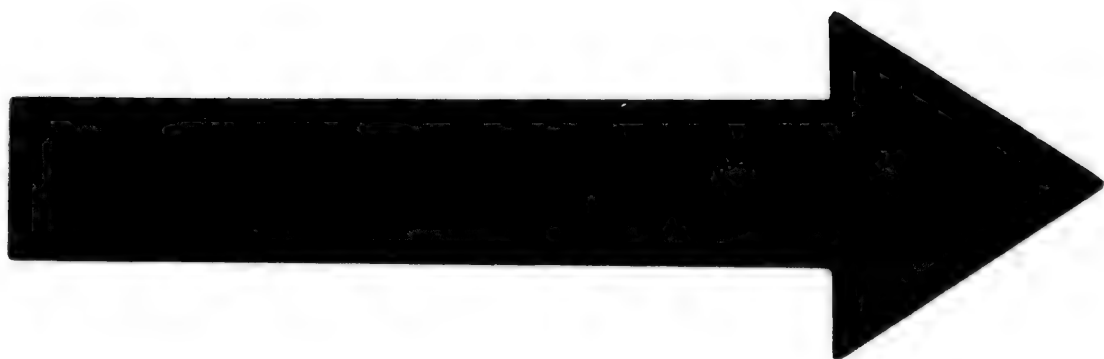
I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

"SINCLAIR THOMSON."

A proposition so evidently fair was, of course, not accepted, and nothing came of it. The incident, however, illustrates both the spirit of those with whom Mr. Thomson had to deal, and how he met them. In the year 1844, Mr Thomson published a tract "Upon the Popular Assertion that 'Baptism came in the room of Circumcision,' addressed particularly to the body of professing Christians in Shetland designated as Independents." It was a vigorous, scriptural argument, going to show that Baptism and Circumcision, practiced as they were side by side during the Apostles' days, with no disapproval from those inspired men, could not have been intended the one to be a substitute for the other; that the apostolical assembly at Jerusalem, to whom the Church at Antioch appealed on the question whether Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised, would surely in their reply have given some intimation of the fact, if baptism had been intended to take the place of circumcision; and that this ancient Jewish rite, "wherever it had any special reference to any thing in connection with 'the New Dispensation,'" so far from relating to Christian ordinances, at all, "pointed directly to the circumcision of the *heart*, or 'new creation in Christ

Jesus.'” Among the concluding words are these :
 “ It is now thirty-four years since I doubted the validity of Infant Baptism, and thirty-one years since I differed with you in practice on the subject of Christian Baptism, both as to its subject and mode. Nevertheless, if you can point out to me from the *standard* that I have mistaken the will of him who is ‘ Head over all things in the Church,’ whether in this or in any thing else, I solemnly promise to retrace my steps. Surely, my brethren, you admit the capability of the Book of God to guide us in Baptism, as in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, or in any thing else. Surely you will never call it an institution of Christ, in the case of which we can not read *the time when, the place where, and the person by whom* the thing was *originally instituted* ! Now apply this rule to Christian Baptism, and say whether you or we walk on surest ground.”

It is not surprising that such strong, earnest, unanswerable words as these had weight with conscientious Christians ; nor that they troubled those who had set themselves for the defence of man-made ceremonies. Many years must elapse before their power will cease to be felt among the people of Shetland.



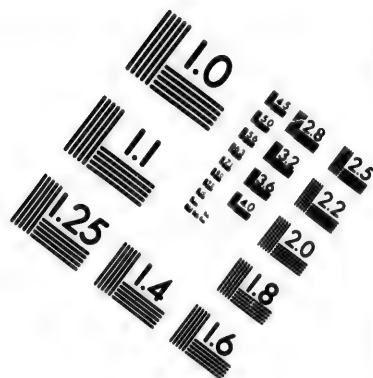
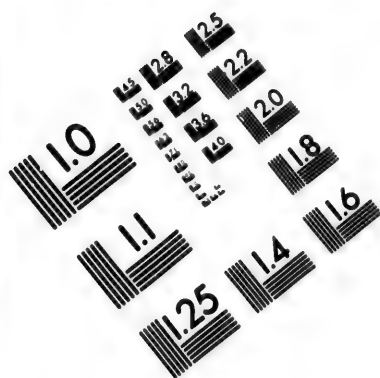
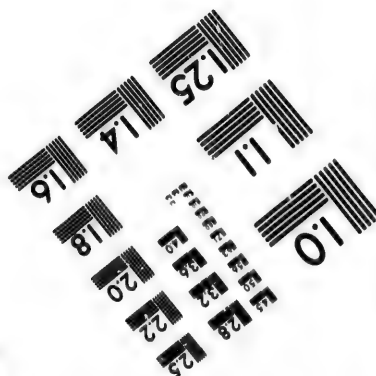
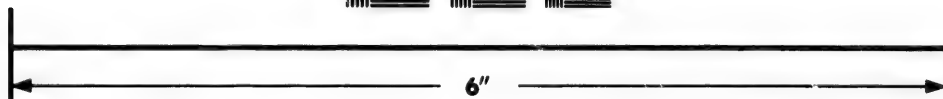
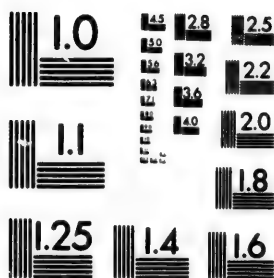


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VIII.

IN LABORS ABUNDANT.



IN a lovely summer day, in the year 1815, at Garth, in the parish of Nesting, a large congregation had assembled to hear the sermon of a preacher, who, it had been announced, would be present at that time and place. The people had come in from long distances, some in boats from the neighboring islands, some on foot, or by very simple modes of conveyance, from places ten or twelve miles distant. No parish kirk opened its doors for their accommodation, and no private dwelling could contain the half of them. So they had met in the open air. The spot was a kind of natural amphitheatre, the ground sloping gently down to a grassy plain which, with the hill-side, fairly shone with the

white clover blossoms and the daisies. The preacher, we need not say, was Sinclair Thomson ; nor that the people heard, that day, " the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."

Among those present was the sexton of the parish church near by, who had been sent out—it being week day—with some business messages to the people of the parish. Coming unexpectedly upon this unusual gathering, and struck with the novelty of the scene, he remained, and heard the sermon to the end. Returning to the manse, he said to Mrs. Inches, the minister's wife :

" I have seen such a strange thing to-day."

" What is it, Thomas."

" A man preaching outside of a house, on Thos. Tait's farm in Garth ; and it was the best sermon I ever heard."

The minister's wife questioned him minutely, wishing to know all the circumstances. She was informed of all that Thomas had himself learned ; that the preacher was not a minister of the Kirk, but one who, upon his own responsibility, and as called alone of God, had recently begun to travel and preach in Shetland ; that he was by birth a peasant, by employment a small farmer and fisherman ; that he had a stated congregation at Spiggie,

Dunrossness, and that besides preaching to them on the Sabbath, he spent all the time he could spare from his farm and his boat, in journeying over Shetland declaring to the people the good news of salvation by Christ. The lady heard him to the end with attention, then walked thoughtfully away, in the direction of the parlor. When at the end of the long hall, she suddenly turned and came back to the kitchen.

"One thing more I wish to ask you, Thomas."

"What is that?" said Thomas.

"Can you tell me who is to pay that man, and when he will be paid?"

"O yes, ma'am," said Thomas, respectfully, "I can tell you that. He is going to be paid by the Great Judge, at the resurrection of the just."

The minister's wife turned quickly, and returned to her parlor without another word.

This incident, occurring, as the date shows, near the commencement of Mr. Thomson's more public ministry, may be taken as illustrating the general character and the frequent effect of one main branch of his labors. He ever considered himself as, not alone the pastor of Spiggie church, but as the messenger of Christ to all Shetland. We shall in the next chapter, detail his heroic and persever-

ing toil in securing places of worship for churches, gathered in other parishes and on other of the islands, as well as for his own church. But that such churches were gathered at all, was due, under God to that self-denying ministration of the Word in which no hardship overcame him, no distance discouraged, no danger daunted him.

At the distance of forty-five miles from his own dwelling was the parish of Lunning. He there established a regular preaching station at an early day, and in 1856 we find him mentioning incidentally that he had preached there nearly one thousand times, in almost every instance performing the journey thither and back on foot ! In the letter from which this statement is taken, he playfully alludes to an account which his correspondent in this country had given of a "Donation Visit." We copy a sentence or two :

"No wonder if your American ministers are devoted to their office. One hundred and forty-five dollars, or forty-one pounds sterling, as a gift, in addition to a fixed salary, is certainly trying to think of. What would such brethren think of rearing a family of eight to full-grown men and women, upon twenty-four pounds annually, and make up the remainder by the 'spade and caizie ;' yet to preach

nigh two hundred times a year, exclusive of prayer meetings, exhortation meetings and Sabbath Schools?"

The points at which these labors were done were, chiefly, Lunnesting, Nesting, Scallaway, Burra Isle, and the Skerrie Isles. There were, however, few of the inhabited parts of Shetland which he did not visit. His sermons he studied mostly, as he travelled, usually on foot, from place to place. the daily journey averaging, perhaps, ten miles. The people would flock to the places where he was expected, and where his appointments were most punctually met, distances of twelve miles or more to hear the morning sermon, returning at evening, as they came, on foot. In the summer season he often would preach three times on the Sabbath at, perhaps, as many different points, and always to large and eager assemblies. He was found always ready, besides, when suddenly and unexpectedly called upon for a sermon. The following incident may illustrate :

At a time when there were, besides his own, only two dissenting places of worship in Shetland, having for a considerable period gone on in his own work under its many disadvantages, he came to feel that it would greatly refresh all his energies

if he could hear a gospel sermon from some minister of piety and talent. Knowing that there was such a one at a place some thirty miles distant, he determined to spend a certain Sabbath there, that he might once more hear a sermon. Accordingly, when Saturday evening came, having spent the day as all the previous ones of that week, in fishing, he informed his family and the members of his congregation that he should be absent on the following day, changed his fishing garments for others more suitable, and without pausing for any rest, immediately set out, as usual, on foot.

At eight o'clock on Sabbath morning he reached the neighborhood of his place of destination. There he learned to his disappointment that the preacher had left on the previous day for another place, distant quite as far as he himself had come designing to remain and preach some days with the people there. He at once gave out notice that there would be preaching at the usual place and hour. The people flocked in to hear the stranger. At the end of the first service he announced that there would be another after an interval of ten minutes. He then preached again. Having taken some refreshments, he set out on his return ; traveled again during the night ; at an early hour on Mon-

day morning reached home ; made no pause, save for his breakfast and a change of raiment, and stepped into his fishing boat.

On this occasion, as on similar ones, Mr. Thomson had his reward. At the close of the second service, a man in the crowd whose heart the Lord had touched, met him as he passed out, and shaking his hand warmly, left in it a one pound note. This same man Mr. Thomson not long after baptised.

The journeys, to and fro, of this laborious preacher of righteousness often tasked both his strength and his perseverance, very severely. This was particularly the case after he had reached an advanced age, and had begun to feel its infirmities. When one reads of him, a man seventy-six years old, travelling on foot a distance of thirty miles, then after a night's rest, by boat six more ; then on foot again six ; then by boat two miles across an arm of the sea to the place where he was to preach, reaching it at four o'clock ; preaching at six ; resting one day after, then devoting a day to pastoral visiting ; then on the following one, Sabbath, three sermons ; next day a journey of five miles, on foot, facing a gale of wind and rain, and preaching in the evening ; back, next day, to a point midway, and

preaching again ; then still further back to the point left the previous day and another sermon in the evening ; next day, the north wind blowing and snow flying, across an arm of the sea in a boat, and preaching again in the evening ; another sermon in the same place next day at noon ; then back to the place where Sabbath had been spent, and another sermon there, to a crowded house ; then thirty miles to Lerwick, and thirty miles more home ;—when one reads of such achievements as these in the way of resolute, physical endurance, the natural thought is that a man who, past his three score-years and ten, could accomplish all this, must have had, even in his old age, a giant's vigor. Yet his letters, about this time, speak of his strength as "much impaired." He says : "I can never travel half a mile without being flooded in perspiration." A little later he complains of suffering from almost constant cold. When he had begun to use a horse occasionally, in his tours, he would be compelled to alight after riding a short distance, even in quite moderate weather, to restore the languid circulation by walking. In one of his letters he speaks of sitting at his writing, in his own house, with a buffalo robe wrapped about his feet, and his shoulders loaded with extra coverings. And

still, to the very last, he kept up his customary tours, meeting his appointments at distances of fifty and sixty miles with unvarying punctuality, and braving gales at sea, and long foot-journeys on land, with unflagging courage and zeal.

One little incident may illustrate his resolute character. Returning from one of his tours, at a stormy season of the year, in which he had traveled long distances in his customary way, preaching day and night, he arrived at Quarff, a few miles from his own home. There he expected to find a wild young horse, which was to be brought over from Burra Isle, about eight miles distant; but as a gale was blowing, with snow, the Burra men had not ventured to cross. Perceiving a six-oared boat lying at Quarff, he persuaded the men to venture out in spite of the gale. They crossed the wild sea to Burra Isle; then, with much difficulty, succeeded in catching the horse and getting him into the boat, and after a dangerous and toilsome passage, returned safely to the point they had left. Mr. Thomson immediately set out for home with his refractory animal, reaching his own house about noon of the next day. At this time he was seventy-three years of age.

In order to appreciate the real nature of Mr.

Thomson's labors, it must be borne in mind that the pleasant season of the year he was obliged, during all his early ministry especially, to improve more or less in work with "the spade and caizie;" his farm and his fishing. In no other way could the wants of his family be met. This made it necessary for him to devote those months in which secular labor must be suspended, to his missionary work. It was, therefore, of necessity, a work attended by great physical hardship, involving a degree of self-denial that seldom falls to the lot of ministers of the Gospel in these days.

In the later years of his life Mr. Thomson, in conjunction with his fellow-laborers in the Shetland ministry, occasionally held what are called in this country "protracted meetings." These meetings were often blessed and fruitful. Mr. Thomson, however, was always distrustful of sensation measures of every kind; more than distrustful, he gave them no countenance whatever. Speaking, in 1856, of such a series of meetings, held in his own church at Spiggie, and of their good result, he adds: "Our Christian friends here seem determined that while they live such a week shall be snatched annually from the bustles, hurries, and snares of life in worldly concerns, and devoted to

the pursuit of more unction from the Father-God. Under that boon all goes well ; in its absence all goes wrong." His views upon some forms of revival labor, and some of the ideas current upon that subject, may be gathered from the following :

" I remember a Methodist preacher in Shetland, once, whose advice generally was, 'Take up some individual into your mind's eye, set your mind upon his conversion, pray to God for it, and he will be sure to be converted.' And he added, further, ' I never knew an instance in which I did so, and failed in the accomplishment of my object !' Now, I leave you to judge how that man upon his own showing, could exculpate himself from the deepest guilt he could commit, if one sinner in all the circle of his acquaintance died unconverted. * * *

The Arminian doctrine plainly amounts to this ; the sinner must begin with God, and if he does, God will be sure to follow up his—the sinner's—commencement. At other times it speaks the very reverse, namely, that God has already begun with every sinner upon the face of the earth, but that in the greater number of cases the sinner will not end in his conversion, and he perishes, and the purposes of God are frus-

trated ! * * * A careful perusal of the first chapter to the Ephesians will show the origin of all the real conversions that have taken place, or ever shall take place upon the earth."

Mr. Thomson, both in his doctrinal views and his ideas of proper methods of Christian labor, was of a like spirit with that generation of Baptist ministers in our own country who have now nearly all passed away. His theology he had gained almost exclusively in diligent, personal study of the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Gospel stood forth to his mind guarded by the sovereignty of God; the salvation of the sinner was to him always a work of the Lord's mere mercy; and he was justly suspicious of all those views, or those schemes of labor, which even seemed to claim as a work of human endeavor that which must always have its source in the divine purpose of grace toward each redeemed soul, and be wrought out by divine power. How far some of his practical views might have been modified, if it had been possible for him to mingle more with his brethren in other lands, we cannot tell. Laboring in his own comparatively retired sphere, working out all religious problems mainly in the silent meditations of his own mind, he lacked the qualifying and shaping influence

that is found in the mutual intercourse of men of like faith. He may have, undesignedly of course, judged some of his brethren at a distance, and their measures, rather severely. His own work might have been more fruitful, if he had felt at liberty to infuse his preaching more with exhortation and appeal, and had insisted more upon the fact that God never takes out of man's hand the responsibility of his own soul's perdition, if at last his soul be lost.

Yet there was always a singular power in Mr. Thomson's preaching. He always drew the people after him. In all weathers they would flock to hear him. When upon his tours in "the South country," Scotland and England, collecting money for his chapels, not alone "the common people heard him gladly," but learned divines and professional men as well. On one of these occasions a parish minister of the Church of Scotland was present. At the close of the service, this gentleman could not withhold the expression of his delight at what he had heard, and in conversation with Mr. Thomson's travelling companion, a minister of some neighboring town, gave utterance to what he felt in very strong terms.

"If you knew," was the reply, "Mr. Thomson's

history, you would be more astonished yet."

"Let me hear something of it."

"That man," said the friend, "has never yet, in all his life, spent fully one-quarter of a year in school; all besides, is purely self-culture."

The minister held up his hands in astonishment, exclaiming, "Mr, Sowerby, he puts us both to shame!"

In his visits among the English Baptist brethren in London and elsewhere, he was always cordially received. At one missionary meeting he was present and addressed the audience from the platform, telling them what great things the Lord had done for Shetland. As he came down, eager hands were reached out to greet him, and every evidence given of fraternal sympathy and high respect.

Of the results of Mr Thomson's labors, in Shetland, we are not prepared to give many particulars. Fifteen years before his death, we find him speak of the whole number of Baptists in the islands as two hundred and ninety. This number had probably been increased to four or five hundred when he died. The churches were five in number:—Spiggie, Lunninging, Sandsting, Scallaway, Burra Isle and Skerrie Isles. In Burra Isle, Rev. John

Inkster is pastor ; long Mr. Thomson's valued brother and fellow helper, to whom he often alludes in his letters, in terms of great affection. In Scallaway Rev. Robert Scott has been for many years the efficient pastor. These two brethren, with Rev. Gavin Mouat, Mr. Thomson's son-in-law, his associate at Spiggie for many years, and now his successor there, were frequently engaged with him in preaching tours, and in continuous meetings. Their names often occur in his correspondence, and in a way to show how much he valued their fellowship, sympathy and help.

In this brief sketch we have not attempted any fullness of detail. That we found impossible for many reasons. Enough has, however, we trust, been said, to show with what justice we have given to this faithful, laborious, resolute, Christ-like preacher of the Gospel, the name of "The Shetland Apostle."



IX.

CHAPEL BUILDING.



WE have spoken of Sinclair Thomson as the first Baptist, and the first Baptist minister, ever known in Shetland. We now come to speak of him as the builder of the first Dissenting chapel ever reared in those islands. The Independents were, indeed, before the Baptists in the organization of churches ; but the Baptists were the first to erect a separate place of worship.

The small, plain building proposed for this purpose, near Mr. Thomson's house, in Spiggie, has already been described, and with what joy he and his brethren entered it, and there erected the altar

of their simple worship. This building, however, was soon found to be inadequate. When crowded full it would not hold more than two hundred persons ; so that, in pleasant weather, when four or five hundred people would sometimes come together, it was found necessary not unfrequently to hold the meeting outside. It was, besides, not sufficiently central, being at one side of the parish of Dunrossness, to which Spiggie belongs. It was, therefore, determined, in 1816, to erect another, at a point more central. A desirable location was found at a distance of some three miles from Mr. Thomson's house, and a site leased, at an annual rent of ten shillings, sterling.

In other countries, and probably in Shetland now, the erection of such a house as was here proposed would be a small matter. It was a really formidable undertaking to Mr. Thomson and his little flock then. The building when complete was found to have cost nearly five hundred dollars ; and at the outset it was seen to be necessary to provide, in some way, not far from this sum. Among his own people Mr. Thomson succeeded in procuring only five pounds, or twenty-five dollars. With this amount in hand he determined to begin, and did so. The work was commenced,

and simultaneously, the diligent pastor, in addition to all his other cares and labors, undertook that of collecting, in his own and neighboring parishes, enough in addition to at least complete the walls. In the summer of 1816 the walls were finished, forty feet by sixteen, inside, and eight feet high. By this time it had cost some thirty pounds, and the pastor, who had assumed all the pecuniary responsibility, was ten pounds in debt. He began his soliciting work again, and during the following winter and spring had paid this debt, with five pounds left for the roofing, lighting, finishing and furnishing.

In the hope of adding somewhat to this in the summer of 1817 he visited Edinburgh and obtained some help. Returning, he continued his efforts to the same end at home. In 1818 the house was roofed with slate, and finished throughout, in a temporary way. The whole cost had now amounted to something over ninety-seven pounds sterling, of which more than forty-two pounds—above two hundred dollars—remained unpaid. Mr. Thomson still bore the whole responsibility of the undertaking. All the property he had in the world, if sold, would not have amounted to one-half the sum he had now to raise. His own family

expenses were a continual burden and care to him. His sixth child had just been born. The necessity for being so much absent from home had compelled him to employ a man servant the year round. What he received for preaching and pastoral service was but the merest pittance. It was an anxious winter that followed the temporary completion of the house of worship and its first occupancy, thankful as he and his brethren were that so far they had succeeded.

Mr. Thomson's first fear was that his creditors would become impatient, and to secure so much of the debt as possible come upon him with an execution and sell from him his little all. He went to them with a frank statement of all the circumstances. They met him in a spirit of kindness and confidence ; told him to do his best and they would allow the debt to stand for two years without interest. Mr. Thomson then wrote to a gentleman in Edinburgh, hoping to procure a loan, with the church property pledged as security. This failed. The next year he went himself to Edinburgh and raised somewhat above eleven pounds. To this, one pound was added at home ; a loan of thirty pounds procured from a friend, and with this the debt discharged. At the end of six years this loan

had also been paid, and at last the house was out of debt.

As we said before, to those who engage in church-building enterprises in circumstances which make the raising of thousands of dollars a light matter, this which we have just recited may seem like a small undertaking, and the burden a trifle. It was not so to Mr. Thomson and his friends. How much a man can lift always depends upon the length of his lever, and the amount of weight he can bring to bear on its long arm. Mr. Thomson's lever was a very short one, and the weight but light. It was steadfast perseverance, working the more industriously because the means were small, that brought the desired end at last.

In the summer of 1818, the Spiggie brethren began occupying their new house of worship, temporarily finished. As the work in the islands went on, it was found necessary to provide chapels at other points, and the expectation of being able to finish this first erection in better style seems to have been delayed for some twenty years. In 1839, the proposed improvements had become so necessary that they could no longer be deferred. The wall had given way on one side ; the roof had become leaky ; the whole building in sad need of repairs.

In the summer of the year just named, the roof was taken off, one-half of the south wall built up afresh, and the whole interior renewed. We will let Mr. Thomson describe what was done, in his own words :—

“ We have built a new gable inside the west end of the house, by which we cut off six feet for a vestry, with a fire-place in the vestry-side of the new gable. We have given the whole building a new roof, with the exception of some of the old slates. Not one old longband (rafter) was put on again. Couples, crossbaulks, and longbands are all of the best quality of Norway logs, from Lerwick. Then we lathed and plastered the roof from the crossbaulks down, and smooth-plastered the walls, vestry and all. Next we turned to the seating; took out all the old seats, with the exception of the eight long seats, next to the east gable. Then we squared a piece of the west end of the house as one seat, which we floored, and at the gable put up a new pulpit,—very splendid—with a round front, and a precentor's desk. The square seat will hold about thirty people. We then plenished the rest of the house, out through to the eight seats mentioned before; all, both old and new, facing the pulpit. Then we got two chandeliers from Edinburgh, holding six candles each, and two for the pulpit; so that were you coming in after dark, under the blaze of fourteen candles, reflecting their light upon the white roof and walls, you would never think it was our place of worship.”

It might do fastidious people good to see, in

the above, what simple and plain accommodations are sufficient, and even "splendid," for those who think more of the Divine Presence in the sanctuary, than whether

"From marble domes and gilded spires
The curling cloud of incense rise,
And gems, and gold, and garlands deck
The costly pomp of sacrifice."

The cost of these repairs amounted to forty-seven pounds sterling. Twenty pounds had been raised and paid on their completion. The remainder was met in time, and by means similar to those already described. Upon entering their renovated house of Worship, the Church organized a Sabbath school, the first ever known in Shetland.

In 1860 the house was again altered and repaired. Previous to that time it had been lighted by means of skylights in the roof. Five "large windows," four feet four inches by three feet four, were now put in; three upon the south side, two upon the north. A new roof was given it "of wood, felt and tar," the inside of the roof lined with Norway white fir, "particularly planed," and the walls newly lathed and plastered. The church was thrown out of its place of worship some four months, occupying, meanwhile, a school-house, near by. The whole cost was about one hundred and forty

pounds. In this case, again, the entire responsibility was taken by Mr. Thomson ; his brethren anxious for the result, but taught by much experience to confide surely in his sagacity and energy. On the day of the opening he had the happiness of announcing to them that the whole expense had been met, with a small balance on hand. They could scarcely credit the good news, till the stems were given. Twenty-seven pounds had been subscribed by the church, at the outset. The brethren and others had also given, in labor, some twenty pounds. The remainder, ninety-seven pounds, Mr. Thomson had raised by means of correspondence, and through a printed appeal which he sent out.

The second enterprise of this kind, which it was found necessary to undertake, was in connection with the church on Burra Isle, eight miles north of Dunrossness. Mr. Thomson had very early made this one of his chief points of occasional labor, and in due time a church was organized. An excellent brother, John Inkster, from the time that he himself had received the truth, had made himself very useful in Christian work among his neighbors and friends, and after a season was called to a pastoral care of the church. He was the second Baptist

preacher in Shetland. They built a small chapel about the size of a tenant-house, very plain, and by no means commodious. It had a thatched roof, with skylights ; it had no plastering on the walls ; and was seated with rough boards laid with the two ends upon stones.

Soon after the house at Spiggie had been built in its first form, and was out of debt, this at Burra began to show such signs of decay that the people dared not enter it for their worship save when there was no wind. So it was on one winter day, when Mr. Thomson himself was present. The people dared not venture in, a strong wind blowing. What should be done ? The church numbered about a dozen members, There was very little money amongst them. Their good pastor was almost in despair. One day Mr. Thomson said to him in his peculiar way :

“O, Brother Inkster, do not despair. Turn to, when summer comes, and build the stone walls of a suitable house, and then, if I am able, I will take it off your hands and finish it.”

The pastor took him at his word. The roof was removed from the old house, the walls taken down and a new foundation laid. The pastor devoted his whole summer to the work. With his own

hands, assisted only by one little boy; who gathered small stones for him to use, he erected the walls, and by the autumn could claim his brother Thomson's promise.

It was promptly redeemed. Mr. Thomson procured lumber and other material for the roof; employed a joiner for the inside work, and in two months and a half more, the Burra church had a neat, comfortable sanctuary, in which to worship God. But another debt was the result, this time amounting to fifty pounds. To raise this, a journey to Edinburgh and London was found necessary. A brother of Mr. Thomson's in command of a trading smack to Ireland, contributed something and by his means also a small sum was obtained from certain of the Irish Baptists. The Burra people helped, and at the end of eighteen months this debt was also paid.

The Skerries are a group of small islands about sixty miles distant from Dunrossness. The inhabitants, at the time of which we write, had long been apparently of those for whose souls no man cares. They had not even had a common school there, within the memory of man, nor any means for even teaching the youth to read, save occasionally the service of some old woman, grown too infirm for

manual labor. Mr. Thomson, made aware of their condition through visits to the island when on his fishing expeditions, became early much interested in them. They could only be reached by a voyage of sixty miles across a stormy and treacherous sea. Yet for more than twenty years he maintained a regular preaching service there during the summer months; the islands being in winter quite inaccessible. The Skerrie group was not very thickly populated; yet in summer there were always two or three hundred fishermen there through whom, while themselves benefitted, distant portions might be reached.

Mr. Thomson's first effort, next to his own preaching, was to provide a teacher for those islands. A young man was engaged, and the Spiggie pastor travelled from place to place in Shetland, raising the means to pay him his salary. After about three quarters of a year the funds failed and the teacher returned. Two years more having passed, another teacher was procured, his salary being raised in the same way. He continued two years, and the result brought Mr. Thomson four pounds in debt again. An old hut had been occupied both for teaching and preaching purposes. It now gave out wholly, and fell to the ground.

This imposed the necessity of providing another and better place. After great exertion one was finally erected, thirty feet by fifteen, and adapted in its construction to the double purpose of a school-room and a chapel. In all these efforts for the good of the Skerrie people, Mr. Thomson had to fight his way against the opposition of the minister to whose parish the Islands belonged, and who discouraged or resisted, from first to last. This unfaithful shepherd had never interested himself for that part of his charge, having never even visited the islands save once, and then on a pleasure excursion with a British naval officer. But, however slack in his own duty, he was energetic enough in opposition to those who tried to do theirs.

This opposition made the effort to raise funds sufficient to meet the expenses of the Skerrie chapel the severest work of the kind Mr. Thomson had yet undertaken. The sum was sixty-five pounds; about three hundred and twenty-five dollars. Owing to other circumstances the matter became exceedingly embarrassing. Dr. Candlish, of Edinburgh, a leading minister of the Free Church of Scotland, had engaged to furnish the means to meet any indebtedness that might accrue, and also to sustain a teacher on the islands. When

the work was done, Mr. Thomson wrote him a full statement, asking for means to discharge the arrears. Dr. Candlish sent, in reply, twenty-five pounds, but required that the whole amount should be secured by a lien upon the church property in the name of the Free Church. To this the gentleman who owned the land would not consent, and Dr. Candlish insisted upon his terms. As the result, Mr. Thomson was obliged to become responsible for the twenty-five pounds, which had now been expended, and for the remainder of the indebtedness. He writes :—

“I did not know what to do ; only I knew that I could spread the whole case before the Lord. I then drew up a short statement, and sent it to a printer in Aberdeen. In the meantime Mr. Gearson, of Queendale, who was in the parish at the time, hearing of my dilemma, at once enclosed to me an order in favor of Dr. Candlish, to be paid him in Edinburgh, for the whole sum of twenty-five pounds. When I received the order, ‘I rejoiced for the consolation.’ I saw besides the hand of God in it.

“Old Miss Strong required my attendance, to write some letters, and when I had finished, she gave me five pounds, saying, ‘I doubt not the

Skerrie Kirk will be crying for money. The other night, just as I was falling asleep, it came into my mind that I ought to give five pounds for the Skerrie Isle Kirk, and just as if an audible voice had spoken it.'

"Think, my brother, whether there was any Providence here. One day, it happened, I enclosed a copy of my printed appeal to a person in London, with whom I had done some business, and the result was he collected and remitted to me fourteen pounds and eleven shillings! Especially one day, it struck me very forcibly to enclose an appeal to Arthur Anderson, Esq., of London. He soon returned a letter of thanks, for giving him an opportunity to aid in so laudable an undertaking. From a letter which I had enclosed along with the copy of the appeal, and from the appeal itself, he drew up a new appeal, printed and circulated it through London, and lately wrote to me, saying he had got above twenty pounds! In addition, he had the promise of twenty pounds, annually, for the support of a teacher in Skerries."

These incidents occurred in 1846. They will, we are sure, impress the reader as not unworthy to be numbered among instances of signal answers to prayer. With Mr. Anderson's help, a dwelling was

built in Skerries for the teacher, and provision made for his annual salary of twenty pounds.

For several years, up to the date last mentioned, Mr. Thomson had made Lunningesting, a place some forty-five miles distant from his own residence, one of his regular preaching stations. About 1846 the membership of the church there had become some twenty in number, but they had no chapel. The place of meeting had been a private house, where also the preacher was accustomed to lodge when on his stated visits. For various reasons this house could no longer be occupied for either purpose. The other dwellings in that quarter were widely scattered, and none suitable to be a substitute. It was determined to build a chapel, and to adapt it to the purpose of an occasional lodging-house, as well. This was done at a cost of about seventy-five pounds. We will let Mr. Thomson describe its interior arrangements, which were certainly somewhat unusual in such edifices. We must premise that the building was erected adjoining to the house used before, as just mentioned, and attached to it upon the south end, a barn having been removed to make room. The material, we may add was necessarily procured at a considerable distance, and its transportation made the cost heavy. Mr. Thomson says :

“The house measures thirty-six feet by thirteen inside. In the south gable there is a chimney and store-press built in the wall, with a large window upon the west, or front-sidewall. In that end of the house is a room struck off, thirteen feet square. To save room, a bed is prepared, which is let down at night. Here the preacher sleeps comfortably all night, and in the morning the bed is folded up and stands at the wall on one side of the room, occupying little more space than a chest of drawers. The room is floored with deal, and sheathed with wood above, from the crossbaulks down to the well-head ; the partition is also new, well dressed wood.

“There is another article of furniture in the room, which I call a moveable pulpit, consisting of a front, with a book-board resting upon brackets, the same as any other pulpit, and two square sides, with the back open. At one foot up from the floor is the bottom—a fixture. Seven inches higher is a seat, which can be moved or replaced, at pleasure. Then there is a new fir table. There are four common chairs, and as many forms, of proper length so as to occupy the whole of the room for hearers, when there is preaching. At the other side of the partition, there is a room, twenty three feet long. It is closely seated with forms for the accommodation of the people.

“And now for a full view of the place of worship. Fancy that you are the very first person come to the house on the morning of the Lord’s day, and that you knew nothing of the construction of the house, till you learn it from personal observation. You come in at the front door, about the middle of the wall. You see the whole of that apartment filled with forms, ready for use. A little to the right, you

see the partition. You go to it and along it, till you come to the door, near to the opposite wall. You look in at the door ; you see no person, but you perceive the pulpit near the fire ; close to it is the fir table, with cloth laid, cup, etc., for attending to the 'breaking of bread,' all in order, and this room also studded with forms, showing that the service is to be held there. You come on to the fire, and there you find me seated, in the pulpit, before the fire. You take your seat close by. One and another of the church come into the room, and take their seats upon the forms around the table. The people not belonging to the church are in the meantime, assembling in the other apartment. The house at length is full, and the hour of worship has arrived. A brother puts his hand to the partition, and almost in a breath it disappears. I now rise up, lift away the moveable seat from the pulpit, step upon the platform with my face toward the other end, and the whole congregation is before me. The worship goes on till it comes to the breaking of bread. I then step down, lay back the moveable seat into the pulpit, by means of the handles attached to it, turn it around to the table, and seat myself in it, when required, while the Lord's Supper is being attended to.

"When all is over, the people seated in the outer room of course withdraw ; a brother replaces the partition as quickly as it was taken away, and shuts the door. The church can then confer together upon any subject connected with the kingdom of Messiah, deemed necessary at the time. When the brethren go away, the widow (living in the house adjoining) or one of her daughters comes in, puts on the tea-kettle and makes the tea, bringing forth the eat-

ables from the store-press. When the evening meeting, which comes soon after, is over, as many as can, stop awhile for conversation. When these go, the widow's family come in for worship. When that is over, my supper is brought in, and while I am taking it the bed is made and I retire to rest at pleasure ; and a quieter, or more comfortable resting place I never had."

The completion of the house was signalized by a sad event. The day following that upon which the roof was finished, and the building fairly closed in, was a day of storm, a violent gale blowing, with pouring rain. On that day, about eight o'clock in the morning, Michael Humphrey and Thomas Sinclair, brethren in the church, coming from Skerrie Isles in a boat, in company with three other men and three women, were upset and drowned, with all their companions. Fears of the disaster were entertained in the evening of that day, which was Saturday. Confirmation came next morning, just as public worship was about commencing. "Think of my feelings," writes Mr. Thomson, "going through the business of a public meeting fully persuaded that my two dear brothers were no more, yet not daring to moot it ! The moment meeting was over, I had to take my staff and commence my journey among the bereaved habitations ;—but such seasons !"

Duties like these often fall to the lot of the Shetland pastor. "You yet remember," writes Mr. Thomson at another time, "the precariousness of the Shetland methods of fishing; the smallness of the boats; the violence of the waves; the squally character of our atmosphere. Were not great skill and care exercised, how few of the many crazy barks that leave the land would ever return! Through the native love of life and fear of death, Divine Providence preserves men by inspiring needful exertion." His improvement of this thought is characteristic: "So it is with the living soul. It is the love of holiness and fear of sin that keeps the child of God punctual and ardent at the mercy-seat."

The two brothers lost in the way mentioned, were pillars in the Lunnesting Church. In the absence of the preacher, Michael Humphrey, especially, was accustomed to conduct the services. Thomas Sinclair was regarded in much the same light as himself, and when both perished, the church felt that they were bereaved indeed. Mr. Thompson felt their loss peculiarly. But the Lord helped, and the church not only was prosperously sustained, but the cost of the building in due time all defrayed, and, as would appear, with funds

raised wholly or mainly in Shetland. It was, however, through Mr. Thomson's single-handed exertions, that this result was reached.

Other chapels were built, by similar exertions, in Sandsting and Callaway. We can not speak of them particularly. The last of Mr. Thomson's undertakings of this kind was for a chapel in Lerwick, and with some account of this, we close the recital.

Let the reader imagine himself in the town of Lerwick, capital of Shetland, in the year 1863. A group of people will be seen assembled near a building that seems to combine the features of a school-house and a dwelling. The location is a desirable one, central yet airy, accessible, sheltered and dry. The building is of two stories, and some forty-five feet in length, with ample grounds. The occasion is a public sale, the property in question being offered at auction. After the bidding has proceeded for a time, only two competitors remain. One is an old man, wanting only a few months of eighty years. His frame shows the wear of so many Shetland winters, and so many years of strenuous toil. Yet the clear, resolute eye is not dimmed. and the whole bearing of the man is that of one who even at four-score has not yet learned to re-

linquish a right purpose, deliberately formed. The other competitor is a spruce and voluble Catholic priest.

When the bidding ceased, on the part of all save these two, the sum offered had already reached £410, some \$2,000. The two then went on, adding to this at five pounds each bid, until the whole amount offered was £475, not far from \$2,400. The priest finding his adversary showed no signs of giving out, finally withdrew from the field, and the auctioneer announced that the house and grounds belonged to Sinclair Thomson. Speaking of this incident, Mr. Thomson says:—
“When I tell you that my antagonist was no less a dignitary than a Roman Catholic priest, and so far as I know, the first of his order that I had ever seen, you will perhaps wonder that I was not so abashed as to give up the contest. Instead, I am thankful to say, my courage and determination if at all possible, to ‘have the last word,’ rose higher every time he opened his mouth.”

Money for the purchase of a site and the erection of a chapel in Lerwick, had been in process of accumulation, through Mr. Thomson's means, for several years. He had in a Lerwick bank, reserved for this purpose, the sum of two hundred

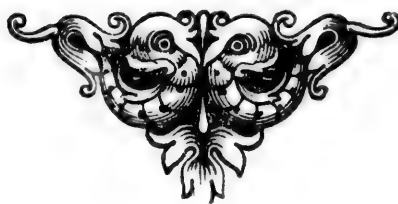
and fifty pounds. In 1857 he had made an extensive tour in Scotland raising funds for this ultimate use ; visiting Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley, Greenock, Stirling, Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen, and several other places. The result of the journey increased the sum then already in the bank to some three hundred pounds. Fifty pounds more had been added by various means, at the time the property was secured, in the way described. Two hundred and twenty five pounds, or some twelve hundred dollars, now remained to be raised.

At eighty years of age, it was impossible for even Sinclair Thomson to attempt an extended tour among the churches of the "South country," in the effort to procure the funds thus needed. He did what proved, probably, quite as effectual ; prepared a printed appeal, in which he stated in brief modest, but touching language, how for more than fifty years he had borne on his heart "the care of all the churches" in Shetland, and by what exertions, in the face of formidable difficulties and much opposition, the cause of truth there, as held by Baptists, had been maintained ; especially noticing the constant care and toil he had himself endured in erecting the six Baptist chapels which had been built in different parts of the island. He

asked his brethren in Scotland and England to send now, the money needful to discharge the indebtedness which he explained as justified and made necessary by the circumstances, and by the absolute demand for a Baptist place of worship in Lerwick. This appeal was met in a corresponding spirit, and as he lay at last, waiting for the summons to depart and be with the Lord, he had the happiness to know that funds had come in sufficient to meet nearly the whole amount.

The lower story of the building secured by this purchase, had been used as a school-room. It was in a condition to be at once converted into a chapel; while the remaining rooms, having been occupied by the teacher as a dwelling, could be devoted to a similar purpose for the pastor of the church. It was a judicious purchase, and has secured to the Baptists of Shetland "a local habitation and a name" in the flourishing capital of the islands. Having seen this done, and so "the little one" which, half a century before, had been born in remote and humble Spiggie, grown to sufficient strength to claim and hold a place in the very heart of Shetland, and to be recognized and respected as a power in the land, the faithful and laborious minister of Jesus, by whom, under God,

all this had been chiefly effected, was ready to "depart in peace," for his eyes had seen what his heart had so long and so earnestly desired.



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READY TO BE OFFERED.



OW truly has it been said, and how often in the history of this world has it been experienced, that

“The chamber where the good man meets his fate
Is privileged beyond the common walks of men.”

Those who had occasion to enter the room where the aged Shetland Apostle, in the summer 1864, waited for his Lord's coming, knowing that it was near, had reason to feel this. It was a place where it was good to be ; a “house of mourning,” and yet a “house of feasting ;” for while those among whom he had gone in and out so many years, preaching the kingdom of God, sorrowed greatly “that they should see his face no more,”

they had with him, at the same time, sweet banqueting seasons, as they foretasted the blessedness so soon to be given him, and in a little time more to themselves also.

Deacon Gavin Henderson, an early and valued friend of Mr. Thomson, of whom he speaks often, in his letters, in the warmest terms, gives some interesting particulars regarding the last labors of his beloved pastor. Through him we learn that but a few weeks before his death, and when already past eighty years of age, Mr. Thomson made two visits to some of the preaching stations which he had maintained so punctually for so many years. The first was to Sandsting, forty-five miles distant, north of Spiggie, and upon the west side of mainland. It occupied him twelve days, during which he preached eleven times. After remaining at home three weeks, he set out again for Lunnesting, nearly fifty miles distant. He spent seventeen days on this tour. The reader will be surprised to learn that the journey was performed, in each case, on foot ; and will be touched at the following recital from Mr. Thomson's own pen ;—the facts of it and the mannner of the relation being equally characteristic :

“ The last four days (of the second tour) were

spent in travelling homeward, and a very laborious travel it was, as the wind was so strong — directly in my face—as to make me stagger occasionally, and upon the more elevated portions of the road, to force me back fully half a step at times. As the weather was dry, I took it in moderate stages, traveling about five hours each of the four days, and when practicable, collecting people round to my lodgings and preaching to them, at six p. m. When such service could be attended to, my lodging-house was always full, and the evening slipped away pleasantly.

This was in the autumn of 1864. Deacon Henderson adds: "Through the rest of the winter and spring, his labors in his Divine Master's vineyard were mostly in the parish of Dunrossness, where he was constantly traveling about, preaching the blessed news of salvation for the perishing, through the obedience unto death of the precious Saviour. When thus exercising, the cross of Christ was preëminently his theme. His last sermon on such an occasion was from that memorable passage: 'For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' The great doctrine of substitution was handled in a masterly, yet simple and impres-

sive style, and with such clearness in illustrating the whole scheme of salvation, as to make it seem impossible for any that heard his voice not to understand the way of a sinner's reconciliation to God. Returning home, he said that he required as much to depend entirely on the 'finished work' to-day, as when he first discovered the way of salvation.

"When preaching thus as a missionary, and on Sabbath evenings, the cross of Christ was his theme. In the mornings of the Lord's day, when preaching to the church, practical religion, in entire devotedness to God, was in general the theme he dwelt upon; and for inducement, he exhibited the exalted and honourable privilege of being the children of God—their privileges here, while in this world, and the glory to which they are brought when taken home to their Father's house in heaven. Very often, when giving an exposition of divine truth which spoke of celestial glory, he seemed to stand in the gate of heaven, and the glory of God and the Lamb did so shine before his spiritual eyes, as that in his description of what he thus beheld, he made his hearers feel that they were sitting under the shadow of the Almighty, and in the very gate of heaven. I often said to myself, when

hearing his voice and beholding his bright countenance, turned heavenward, 'Thou wilt soon be with Jesus, in his kingdom.'"

One of his last sermons Deacon Henderson describes as preached from the words of David, "Preserve my soul, for I am holy." "He considered 'holy' as used in this prayer, as 'set apart for God,' a confessor of his name ; therefore, every true Christian could use the prayer of the Psalmist." Mrs. Mouat, daughter of Mr. Thomson, and wife of Rev. Gavin Mouat, for thirty-five years associate pastor at Spiggie, and now the sole incumbent there, gives a brief account of her father's last appearance at the chapel. "His text was Psalm lxiii. 2, 'To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' Although so very sick and feeble, that it was with difficulty he could remain in a standing position, yet it was generally remarked that his sermon was a powerful one, in every part."

On the next Sabbath day, for the first time in many years, if not the first in all his ministry, he could only watch, through his window, the people on their way to the place of worship, instead of joining them. After a long look out of the window, noting the people as they went by, he said :

"This is a strange sight to me. Yet I think Jehovah knows how willingly I would go. But his will be done."

His daughter, to whom he thus spoke, bursting into tears, he said, "Why are you crying? You see I have been long spared to hold forth to others that Saviour so precious to my own soul, and if he is about to take me home, he will find agents to carry on his own cause. All is well."

To friends who came in from time to time to see him, and who would say how hard it seemed to spare him, he would reply,

"Think of the many years I have lived, and of the good health I have enjoyed the last twenty years of my life, at so advanced an age, and how much God has blessed my labor; how gracious my Heavenly Father has been to me, in giving me strength to work in his cause."

Always during his sickness, when his son-in-law and successor, Mr. Mouat, would call, on his way to the chapel, he would send his love to the church, and ask God's blessing to be upon the labours and services of the day. "A few days before his death," writes Mrs. Mouat, "a preaching brother from another station came to visit him. He was now so far gone that I thought the inter-

view inadvisable, as his articulation had become so very difficult. But when he heard of his brother's arrival, he requested that he should be admitted to his bed-room, and what pains and effort he used, to make himself understood ! In leaving the house, this brother said that the admonitions and advice which he had received would be as nails in a sure place, and by himself never forgotten."

At last, about ten o'clock on the morning of his death, he opened his eyes, looked round upon his family and friends as they stood near, and saying to them pleasantly, "I must now bid you all good-bye," he fell asleep.

"Notwithstanding the amount of good which the Lord had enabled him to do," writes his friend Deacon Henderson, "he would not admit of its being of any worth ; but said that it was all so stained with sin that it required cleansing by the blood of the Everlasting Covenant. As a sinner, he looked for acceptance through Christ only. In him he said that he saw such fullness that if he had never discovered the Gospel scheme *before*, he felt it was sufficient for him *now*, and there he rested, with unshaken confidence. Thus, with his faith firmly fixed on Jesus, his intellectual powers clear, bright and vigorous, his mind calm and

serene, and his prospects of the New Jerusalem unclouded, he calmly resigned his spirit to the arms of his Saviour God."

These reminiscences on the part of those who loved him will not be viewed in the light of eulogy; nor will these that follow, which alike explain and justify themselves:

Says one, "I am now eighty years of age. I have known Sinclair Thomson as a Baptist preacher over fifty years. I have always known him for good in all his movements."

An old servant in the family says: "It is now twenty years since I left his service, with enfeebled strength, bad health, and old age. As soon as he knew my sufferings and destitute condition, he brought me to his house, showed me much kindness, at his death provided a home, with provision for the same."

These two persons were neither of them of his own denominational faith. One of his own brethren testifies, "Wherever his feet have carried him, in the islands of Shetland, there comes a voice, exclaiming, 'We have lost a benefactor, a friend. A calamity has come upon us; there is no one to fill his place.'"

Another adds, "In regard to spiritual matters

he could never go farther than 'Thus saith the Lord.' That was his motto."

We think the reader, in view of all, will share in our conviction that Sinclair Thomson, retired and comparatively obscure as was the sphere in which he spent much of his life, was nevertheless one of those men who, wherever they may be, are sure to be men of mark and of power. He had intellectual gifts much beyond the ordinary; he had moral qualities of the sort that constitute a man a leader among his fellows, draw to him their respect and confidence, and in a sense compel the recognition of his ascendancy; he had, above all, remarkably clear views of evangelical truth, a deep experience of that truth in his own soul, and extraordinary gifts of utterance in making it known to others.

His son, Captain James Thomson, says of him, "In my opinion, his success in preaching the Gospel of Christ to his fellow-men was more particularly to be found in two points. The first that when he worked at anything his whole will was in the work, and when preaching, his whole soul and body were exercised, as could be seen by a glance at his eye and countenance. The second was his easy and ready flow of language, added to his natural powers of persuasion. In this, I think he

excelled many of his peers. In convincing and leading lay much of his strength. In his early ministry," Captain Thomson adds, "he had much to contend against. Baptists were few in number, compared with what is true at present, and their views on the subject of immersion were an eyesore to other denominations. He, being the first native Baptist in the Shetland Isles, and the first originator of a Sabbath school there, was subject to much misrepresentation, and often to abuse, by men calling themselves Christians. But, thanks be to God, who gave the victory, he lived to see a change; outlived the scorn and reproach; saw the time when the opposite, respect, approbation, were accorded, and when, to a large extent, truth and righteousness had prevailed."

In his more private relations, Mr. Thomson was a true friend, a generous neighbour, a kind husband, a loving, tender, but firm and righteous parent. Much of the sources from which what we have written has been gathered we have found in letters written to a friend and brother in this country, Michael Tait, Esq., of Joliet. In these letters the man's whole heart speaks. 'They show a wonderful appreciation of all that could enlist the interest of his correspondent, whom in years gone

by he had baptized, and whom in his removal to this country he had followed with daily prayers. The events transpiring at home are photographed in these letters, incidents and facts touching his friend's own relatives left behind, as well as those of a more general kind, evidently gathered most painstakingly, with a view to render his letters as much as possible sources of information on points most interesting. Pervading the whole was the watchful, loving spirit of the Christian pastor, solicitous for the spiritual welfare of all, especially, whom he had himself been the means of leading to Jesus. Nor was there wanting the occasional gleaming of kindly humor; suggesting how through all his earnestness their ran a vein of cheerfulness that must have made his presence a very sunshine in many a Shetland home.

He was a man of most charitable, bonevolent temper. The spirit of self-sacrifice that made him willing to endure so much exposure, submit to so many privations, and labor so untiringly, without thinking of the "hire," influenced him in other things. He remembered the poor, "often relieving them," says one, "to an extent beyond his pecuniary ability." Nor were these charitable services limited to those of his own denomination. It was

enough to enlist his sympathy and his help, to the very utmost, that one was in want or in any suffering.

How full he was of tender feeling toward his own family was shown when sickness and death came amongst his little flock. In reading his account of the decease of a young son of seventeen, who died suddenly in 1841, one almost hears again the cry of the bereaved father long ago, "My son, my son! would God I had died for thee!" In 1861 his wife died; a stroke which he deeply felt and the effect of which, undoubtedly, hastened his own decline. Two other sons, besides the one mentioned above, had also preceded him to that "bourne" whence none return. Two sons and three daughters survive him. They have carried out into busy, anxious life, the recollection and impression of a true Christian home, where closet and family prayer, the reading of God's word and religious conversation were as much a part of the daily life, as the frugal meals they shared, as the diligent toils in which they participated.

"Their boast is not that they derive their birth
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth,
But higher far their proud pretensions rise :
Children of parents passed into the skies."

Sinclair Thomson lies buried near the chapel where for half a century he had preached that Gospel which "brings life and immortality to light." It was an unusual compliment to be paid a Dissenting minister when clergymen of the Established Church mingled with those who came to look in the good man's face for the last time. A large concourse accompanied the coffin as it was borne from his dwelling to the chapel, a distance of three miles. It was carried, first, a part of the way by members of the church; then his neighbours took it, and bore it the remainder of the distance. After a suitable service, the beloved remains were laid where they will rest "till the heavens be no more." Many sorrowed; but their sorrow was his joy. He had fought the good fight; he had kept the faith; he had finished his course; he had received the crown.

"Servant of God, well done."





APPENDIX.



ANY things in the foregoing narrative are illustrated by the following account of a recent visit to Shetland, which we take from "Good Words," a London monthly, edited by Norman McLeod, D.D.:

Last year, when in Lerwick, I had a few days to spare while waiting the return of the steamer to the south, and I was glad of an opportunity, which turned up unexpectedly, of spending them profitably. Two clerical friends, who had come as a deputation from the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland to visit the mission stations in Orkney and Shetland, were about to proceed to some of the more remote islands, and among others Fair Isle and Foula. The chance was too good to be lost. The weather was unusually settled, and a comfortable passage

to those lonely islands, with pleasant companions, was not to be thrown lightly away. So after calculating the chances of my getting back to Lerwick in time for the return steamer, I decided on accompanying them.

Making an early start on the morning of the 4th of August, from Dunrossness, to which I had been conveyed the previous night on pony-back, a journey of twenty-eight miles, we made our way to the Bay of Spiggie, where our cutter, the "Nelson," was anchored. We observed, on crossing the sands, a great many huge backbones, and learned that they were the remains of a shoal of the bottlenose or ca'ing whales (*Delphinus deductor*), which had stranded themselves and been expeditiously slaughtered by the natives.

It was a perfectly beautiful morning, and the wind though fair was extremely light, so much so that for some time we realized the idea of Coleridge's "Painted Ship." The skin of the sea, if I may use the expression, was as smooth as glass, while the general surface heaved gently up and down with the lazy undulation one would expect in a sea of oil. We had thus a very deliberate view of the west side of the grand headland of Fitful Head, and an excellent opportunity of shooting dozens of porpoises as they came to the surface, with their peculiar wheel-like motion, to sun themselves for a second or two. This opportunity we availed ourselves of to the extent of frightening a few of them. We got near enough the island to see its physical

features distinctly. The extreme north end rises sheer up from the sea like a wall, and on the top the grass grows to the very edge of the precipice. We see numberless incipient caves, and the process of cave-making is made very plain, layer after layer being washed off by the upward action of the water, each layer, as it peels off, making the arch higher. In the north-east end the strata seem to be lying on edge, while in the north they are horizontal, which, taken in connection with the scoræ which are said to be found in other parts of the island, is perhaps an evidence of volcanic action. The stacks and rocks have the most fantastic shapes. One is surmounted by a lump exactly like a lion couchant and looking over its shoulder. The Sheeprock, connected with the island by a ridge not many feet above the sea level, is like a huge sphinx, with the features blurred by too much washing, and another is like an old Rhine castle in ruins. So absolutely wall-like are the rocks that there seems no spot where it is possible to land. There are, however, two little creeks on the east side, and towards one of these our captain turned the prow of the vessel about six o'clock p.m. We see several huts and two or three people on the higher ground, who have noticed us, and are evidently watching our movements with interest. No sooner is it plain that we are making for the shore, than off they rush in different directions with the intelligence. It spreads like wild-fire; groups of women and children are seen on the hillocks, and almost

immediately a boat is making for us, while another crew are seen rushing down to launch a second. And now they are almost alongside, rowing with the peculiar swift stroke of the Fair Isle boatmen. The crew of the one consists of five nice looking boys, the other of full-grown men, who spring aboard of us, all with glistening eyes and a not disagreeable absence of ceremony, arising from eagerness and excitement. Some of them who had seen the Rev. Mr. Cumming, on his previous visit three years before, gave him a very hearty welcome, and were much excited. I think we all felt that the excitement was infectious. Meantime dividing our forces, we are rowed ashore in the two boats, and find a considerable number awaiting our arrival. Singularly enough it happened to be the fast day, so that the arrival of two ministers was somewhat striking. They are pressed to stay over Sunday and assist the missionary in celebrating the Communion. This involved a complete derangement of their plans, but there seemed something so appropriate in the unexpected coincidence of the fast day with their visit, that they were tempted to discuss the possibility of complying with the request. A conference was accordingly held. The ministers give good strong reasons for not staying over Sunday, but the islanders, with an interesting disregard of logic, arising from their anxiety, set them aside, and propose various plans by which their remaining may be made possible. My compelled return south by Monday's

steamer was a difficulty which they proposed to meet by offering to send out to the steamer on her passage. My baggage was, however, in Lerwick, and this plan would not suit. One of them turned to the captain and said, "Take ye da boat awa', and leave dem here."

"Yes," said the captain, "but how will you manage to keep them here?"

"Oh! der be no fear o' keeping dem, if da boat be awa'."

This was said with a twinkle of humor, for he knew on how few days in the week it was possible either to leave or approach the island. As a last attempt they turned to Mr. Cumming, saying, "Stay you and let da rest go." This, of course, was out of the question, and after it was finally decided not to stay, I heard one saying to his neighbor, with a look of exultation and a glance at the sky, "I think he'll (the wind and tide are always masculine) be a dead calm. They'll no get awa,' and we's be a' richt after a'"—an anticipation that was almost realized, inasmuch as it took us twenty-eight hours to reach Foula, a distance of about fifty miles.

There was now a considerable number of women around us, many of them thin and apparently ill-fed, with a worn look produced by hard work and poor fare, which made it almost impossible to guess their age. There was also a number of children staring at us open-mouthed, all of them *covered* in some way or other, none of them *dressed*. They had evidently not expected evening visitors.

We were asked to go and see the school-house, which had been disused for sixteen months. We found it dismantled, part of the roof off, three tables that had served for desks, and one form and a half. The sole occupant was a hen, perched comfortably on a joist over which there remained a fragment of the roof. Every thing gave evidence of its having been for a long time used as a hen-house. Till about sixteen months before our visit they had been for some time without any resident clergyman. A missionary is again settled among them, who is to combine the duties of teacher and preacher. The parents expressed great anxiety for the resumption of school work. We then visited one or two of the dwelling-houses, which are not unlike many to be seen elsewhere in Shetland. Two or three benches arranged along the wall, one or two chairs, or something made to do a chair's duty, such as a "whummilled" cask or peat cleel, and a large wardrobe-looking cupboard, or it may be a chest of drawers, are the principal articles of furniture. The fire is in the centre of the floor, all the smoke that does escape finding its way out by a hole in the roof or by the door. It does not all escape however, for the atmosphere is sometimes very smoky. If they have not learned to consume their own smoke, they at any rate contrive to economise it, for the rafters are literally covered with fish of various kinds which are thus smoked and preserved. You may find a pig luxuriously enjoying the hot ashes, hobnobbing with a dog, cat or lamb across

the hearth, and a few chickens are sure to be going about. As there is usually no limit to their supply of peats, the kitchen is often oppressively hot. The sides of the passage which leads to the better room of the house are lined with box-beds, which form the partition between the two apartments.

It was now approaching the hour at which service was to begin. A couple of hours had been allowed to elapse, that messengers might give information through the island. The utmost alacrity was shown to have the news conveyed, and at eight o'clock we found the church filled from corner to corner. The psalm tunes were peculiar, and sung lustily, with a not unpleasant, wild, wail-like cadence which was new to us all. There are some families of Methodists in the island, who were present, and interspersed the sermons with a running commentary of Scripture phrases, ejaculations and groans, some of which were wofully misplaced, indeed ludicrously so. After service a good many Bibles and other religious books were distributed at the church door, some of the islanders, whether from godliness or greed, contriving to come in for a double or triple share.

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To Shetlanders the sea and its products are of paramount importance, and some account of their fisheries is accordingly indispensable. They are of three kinds, the herring, coast, and deep sea or

ha'af fisheries. The first has not been hitherto, and is scarcely expected to be successful, and is not pursued on a large scale. The second is almost a daily pursuit. Immense shoals of the *gudas carbonarius* or, coal fish, swarm round the coasts. In the fry state they are sillocks ; when a year old, pillocks ; and when full-grown, saithe. The two former are articles of home consumption, either fresh or in a semi-putrescent state, when they are called *sour* or *blown*. The fish is gutted, washed in salt-water, and hung up to dry for a week or ten days. Most Shetlanders prefer it in this, to southern notions, questionable state. The full-grown saithe are often abundant round Dunrossness and the Fair Isle, and last year brought £14 per ton.

The principal fishery is that for cod, ling and tusk, which is carried on from May till August. The tusk is a delicious fish, not found elsewhere in Scotland. The distance of the fishing ground varies from twenty to forty miles. The boat used is the Norway yawl, fitted either for sailing or rowing and with six of a crew. Each boat has between seven and eight miles of line and 1,000 hooks. The lines are set in the evening, and if the first haul is not successful they may bait and set them again. They sometimes remain out two nights, if the weather is fine, during which they must content themselves with very little sleep and scanty fare. They take nothing with them but oat-cakes and water, or perhaps *bland*. This beverage is, I

believe, peculiar to Shetland, and is prepared in the following way. After butter has been made, hot water is poured into the sour milk in the churn, which causes a curd to subside. This curd is used as food, and there is left a mixture of serum and water, which by-and-by ferments and forms a sourish, and by no means disagreeable, drink, very refreshing in summer and much liked by the natives. The fishers erect temporary huts on the shore nearest to the fishing ground, where during the day, or stormy weather, they rest, and substitute for oatmeal and bland a diet of fish and potatoes.

When the fish are brought to the shore they are handed to the curer, who weighs and keeps an account of them. They are then split up and boned, and after being washed in sea-water, are put into a vat, the fish and salt being in alternate layers. Two days afterwards they are taken out, washed and piled into stacks for a day or two. They are then spread out on the beach day after day until they are sufficiently dried, after which they are stored up, the air being carefully excluded, till they can be shipped for market.

The ha'af fishing has many a sad tale to tell of drowning and disaster. Their boats of eighteen feet keel and six feet beam are little fitted to weather a severe storm. Anxious not to lose their lines—in many cases their all—the poor fishers bravely try to keep their ground, and often lose their lives as well. Such calamities are more overwhelming from the fact that the crew of a boat are

often all members of the same family. At such terrible times the warmth and kindness of the Shetland character come out admirably, one family bringing up one orphan, another another, doubtless from the feeling that next season, or next week, their own little ones may be in similar case.

Hibbert, in his "History of Shetland," mentions a toast that used to be, and perhaps is still, given at a rude festival about the beginning of the ha'af fishing:—"Men and brethren, let wis (us) raise a helt (health). Here's first to da glory o' God, and da guid o' wir (our) ain puir sauls, wir wordy landnaister, an' wir lovin' meatmither; helt to man, death to fish, and' guid growth i' da grund." When this fishing is over and they are about to return to their harvest, the toast is, "Cod open the mouth o' da gray fish (sillocks), an' haud his hand about da corn."

In respect of education, Shetland generally is not, to the best of my knowledge, behind the rest of Scotland, except where physical hindrances exist. There are districts where population is so sparse that a sufficient number of children could not be collected to make a schoolmaster's work remunerative; but there are similar districts in the Highlands and Western Islands. I think it may be said that wherever there is material for a school there is one. The island of Walsey, with a population of about 1,000, is an exception, having I understand, no school. Lerwick is well supplied with a very good parish school and the Educational

Institute, besides some private schools. In Bressay there are two good schools, and in the majority of the other islands I have reason to believe there is no grievous educational destitution. I have already referred to the hard work some Shetland ministers must undergo. Efforts are being made to lighten their task, and the process of amelioration will no doubt steadily advance. A very good instance of the isolation and unsophisticated manners of the more remote islands came under my own observation. I had occasion to visit one of them in company with a clergyman, who, on landing, intimated his intention of preaching a sermon. Before the service began, one of the most respectable men in the island came to him, and asked him very earnestly to stay over night. My friend replied that he was sorry he could not, at the same time asking the reason of this special request. The man hesitated a good deal at first, but at last said that he had just thought of taking advantage of his visit to get married, as there was no resident minister who could tie the knot, and it might be a long time before they had another clerical visitor. He proposed accordingly to be proclaimed at the service, and married next day. We were amused at this rather striking method of "improving the occasion," but as the man was thoroughly respectable, and had reached the mature age of at least forty, my friend could not urge the impropriety of the step, on the ground of youthful indiscretion. It was certainly irregular to be proclaimed at week-

day service, but the circumstances were peculiar and the emergency great. He accordingly professed his willingness to marry him immediately after the service, and so get away as he intended. The would be bridegroom said he was not sure that that would do.

"Hadn't you better," suggested my friend, "go to your bride, and see what she says about it?"

"Well," he replied, "I would need to see her *at any rate*," with a significant emphasis on the last three words.

"What," said my friend, "have you not spoken to her about it at all?"

"Oh, no!" he replied. "I was just going to ask her now. I think she'll marry me, but I thought it better not to ask her till I knew whether you could stay till to-morrow."

He went and saw her, and came back somewhat downcast, saying that she had no objection to marry him, provided the minister could wait till to-morrow, but she thought it rather too hurried to be proclaimed and married on the same day.

My friend could not wait, and, so far as I know, the poor man is still in the misery of single blessedness.

Till lately, the only tolerable road on the mainland was that between Lerwick and Tingwall, a distance of about five miles. This want of intercommunication was a dead weight on the material prosperity of the country, and has now been removed. Good roads have been and are still being

made in every direction, the benefits of which will be felt more and more every year.

The Shetlanders have two grievances of which they complain bitterly, and I think justly—the church and poor law. The rentals of the various parishes are small—in some cases very small—and the heritors have, notwithstanding, the same parochial burdens to bear as the rentals were large. It is not at all uncommon for a whole rental and a half to be expended on church and manse in one year. To suggest a practical remedy for this is no easy matter.

The poor law bears heavily on Shetland from the fact that a great proportion of the mail population are sailors, who, from their profession, fail to acquire a domicile in any other parish, and the consequence is that when they become old and infirm, they and their families are thrown back on their native parish. It might be supposed that this would be felt equally by other seafaring populations, such as those of the Western Islands. It is not so, however. The inhabitants of the Western Islands remove by townships and colonies, and never return. The parochial assessment in Orkney and Shetland is, I understand, considerably higher than that of the average Scotch county. The remedy for this would be to introduce a national system instead of a parochial rental one.

I do not think that I should like to live in Shetland all the year round, but it has many attractions during the months of July, August, and September.

There is, for example, fishing without stint—a sort of paradise for anglers. The almost innumerable lochs with which the islands are studded teem with fine fresh water trout, the seashores swarm with splendid sea trout from July to October, and the angler may wander from loch to loch, and from voe to voe, without let or hindrance. Salmon, too, are occasionally caught in the voes. The seeming abundance of this fish in Laxo voe induced an Aberdeen Salmon fisher to attempt the establishment of a fishery, but after three years' trial he was obliged to abandon the undertaking, the quality of fish caught not proving sufficiently remunerative.

Again, during these months, there are added to the very pleasant society of Lerwick, parties of friends from Edinburgh and England, then on visits, and expeditions of all kinds are of frequent occurrence. To day it is a boating, to-morrow a riding pic-nic. I have very agreeable recollections of many such.

A week in Shetland is a great relief to a man oppressed with correspondence. It is, perhaps, a question of temperament. I confess it suits mine. As soon as the steamer has started on Monday, you feel that for seven blessed days you need neither write nor expect a single letter. He is a happy man who can not conceive how this, once a year, is a great comfort. The prevalent diseases, arising from the dampness of the climate, are said to be rheumatism, croup, and consumption. It does not appear, however, that Shetland is on the

whole unhealthy, as many of the inhabitants attain a very great age.

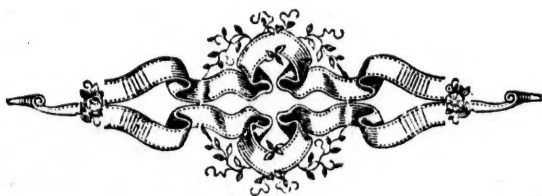
The Shetlanders, like all other spirited, highly imaginative, and danger-daring people, are undoubtedly very superstitious. Considering their isolation, and the vicissitudes of their daily life, I should consider it a hopeless trait of character, and a proof of intellectual dullness, if they were not.

Many a tale of superstition could be told, if space permitted, of mermaids, shooplitees, forespoken water, fairy circles on the ground, the casting of knots, witches who can raise and lull storms, evil eyes that charm away milk from cows, charms that can cause or remove disease, trows or "guid folk" who carry off cows and children and leave changelings in their stead, etc., but it would take a Shetland summer's day and winter's night to give any approximate idea of their lively fancies, and I shall not attempt it.

It is, perhaps unnecessary to remark that, as in Orkney, there are very few trees, and in the middle of summer scarcely any darkness. On glancing round a church, one sees more of the unmixed Scandinavian type of feature than in Orkney, which has more frequent communication with the mainland of Scotland.

Many topics of interest are necessarily left untouched, and I am aware how imperfect these sketches are. I shall have done all I intended, if I have succeeded in giving to those who have never visited these islands a more correct idea than

is generally entertained of the refinement and hospitality of the well-to-do classes and of the honesty and simplicity of character of the poorer classes of a country in which I have been much interested, have received much kindness and made many friends, and my annual visit to which, in spite of its hyperborean latitude, I always look forward to with pleasure.



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